

# MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

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## Winging Through

A COMPLETE NOVEL—A DRAMATIC STORY OF THIS AIRPLANE  
AGE WHEREIN FLYING MEN FIND HIGH ADVENTURE  
ON THAT LAST FRONTIER, THE UNSTABLE AIR

By Richard Howells Watkins

"THE pay roll money hasn't come, Rock, and when I telephoned your father he said it wasn't a mistake," Darcy Murthoe announced grimly.

Rockley Sutherland took off his horn-rimmed spectacles and laid them, wearily, on the table. He was a tall, rather thin young man, sedate even without his glasses, and somewhat pale.

"That means something," Sutherland murmured, much vexed. "Most regrettable!"

Picking up a blue print of an airplane wing, he regarded it fixedly and affectionately. But after a moment he raised his head and surveyed his business manager with determination.

"I shall have to go to New York to-day to see him, Darcy," he decided. "I can't permit important aeronautical work to be interrupted because of mere matters of finance. We must have that money by—when did you say?"

"To-morrow. Thursday is pay day," Darcy Murthoe replied promptly.

Rockley put down the blue print petulantly.

"I am doomed, then, to spend three hours on a train to go and come ninety miles," he remarked with sudden bitterness. "Any old airplane could do it in three-quarters of an hour."

"Never mind; at least you don't make the trip often," Murthoe consoled him, with a private grin.

"No, I do not," Rock Sutherland admitted. "I'm afraid I have rather neglected father lately. When was it I encountered him last—February, or was it March?"

"About two months ago, anyhow," Murthoe suggested.

Rock's contrition did not last long.

"After all, that cannot be helped," he remarked. "I have work to do, Darcy. I must get along with the design of the new speed plane, although I am really quite pleased with the Falcon. That plane is fast; faster than anything that has ever flown."

"Better fly it first," Darcy muttered to himself, turning from the table. But the quick ear of Rock Sutherland caught the remark. He stood up as if stung.

"The wind tunnel tests and my calculations prove it absolutely," he declared emphatically. "Why do you always doubt my statements until you see them actually carried out?"

"Oh, I wasn't doubting, exactly," Darcy said rather effusively. "Not being an aeronautical engineer, I can't believe everything I see on a blue print."

Sutherland shook his head solemnly.

"The theory of the thing is everything; practice follows inevitably if theory is correct," he asserted dogmatically.

Darcy did not prolong the discussion. He had found the mere practice of flying hard enough.

"I'll catch the next train," Rock announced with a sigh. He dived hastily into his spectacles, sat down again at his big table, and picked up a pencil. "Ask Mike Rice to bring the car around at ten minutes before train time, will you, Darcy?"

Murthoe nodded. Before he had closed the door, Sutherland was immersed in his calculations, muttering to himself, filling a corner of a sheet of paper with cabalistic signs, and then staring blankly out into space.

Had his eyes taken in that which they were seemingly surveying, they would have viewed a great peninsula of greensward, almost as flat as a polo field. This was one of the few clear level areas on the north shore of Long Island. It was located among the great estates that cluster about the headlands and bays of that beautiful coast.

The flying field was plateau land, for just beyond it the ground fell away on three sides, tumbling downward in wooded slopes to the beaches lapped by the warm, placid waters of the Sound.

But it was not beautiful in Rockley Sutherland's eyes; it was admirable—as a site for his aeronautical laboratory and testing ground.

The only flaw in the whole place, in Sutherland's opinion, was the big country house that his father had built, years before, at the head of the peninsula, looking out across the waters.

The house, in its gracious conformity with the landscape, was the pride of a

noted architect's heart. Rockley Sutherland regarded it as an eyesore. There should not be large houses, however lovely, sticking up on the edge of a flying field, and Rock aspired to the perfect in flying fields as in airplanes.

The house was closed, and young Sutherland, with his staff of assistants and mechanics, lived in two long, low buildings of wood and galvanized iron on the edge of the aerodrome. Several airplanes dwelt in hangars likewise long and at least as luxurious as those sheds that the men occupied.

Rock was rudely wrenched from the world of theory by the heavy fist of Mike Rice, his chief mechanic and occasional chauffeur, drumming on his office door. The mechanic poked his grinning face in immediately after his thunderous tattoo.

"We got to beat it, boss, if we're going to make that train," he announced emphatically.

"Very well," Sutherland muttered, and tenderly set aside his calculations.

Mike succeeded by a combination of dexterity and daring in getting his employer to the train in time.

In due course the train dragged into New York. Rock reached the Seven Rivers Building, and soared skyward to his father's office. This was also the office of the Seven Rivers Railroad, of which Sutherland, Sr., was president and the impelling power.

It was quite apparent that several other people also were desirous of seeing Spencer Sutherland, but eventually Rockley was ushered into the spacious room, with its wide windows revealing the upper bay. He found his father seated as usual at his flat-topped mahogany desk, without a single document garnishing the great plate of glass that formed its upper surface.

Spencer Sutherland was a small, compact man, quick moving, with a keen eye. Like Rock, he too disdained trifles. That was why his desk and his mind were clear for big business.

Beside him, leaning back in his armchair and well-nigh overflowing it, was Jefferson Murthoe, father of Darcy Murthoe, Rock's business manager.

"How, son?" said Spencer Sutherland cordially.

Jefferson Murthoe heaved his bulk out of the creaking chair, and extended a soft hand toward Rock. "And how is the aëro-



nautical branch of the family coming along, my boy?" he boomed with his customary geniality.

"Reasonably well, sir," Rockley answered with scientific reservation.

"And Darcy? Is that son of mine skeddaddling across the sky every day like a busy comet?"

"He's learning, but of course it takes quite a time, sir," Rock replied guardedly. It did not seem loyal to his friend to say that Darcy Murthoe usually found something pressing to be done in the office when Rock's test pilot invited him to try his hand at the control stick of a plane.

Rock leveled his glasses expectantly at his father.

"Now about this money," Spencer Sutherland began. "Rock, do you know what day this is?"

"May—May third," he answered, with a side glance at his father's calendar.

"Your birthday— When are you going to enter the railroad business?"

"Why—" Rock said, and blinked dazedly at the outrageousness of such an inquiry.

"For years you've been fooling around with flying, and you haven't done a thing," said Spencer Sutherland. "Not a thing." He thumped his hand, not heavily but firmly, on the glass top of the desk, as if hammering a cork into Rockley Sutherland's opening mouth. "Not a thing," he repeated. "Where is it? Nowhere."

"But you don't understand—" began Rockley.

"I gave you the use of Soundview, and you made a—a sort of—circus field out of it. All right. I waited. I gave you plenty of money for your laboratory and your wind tunnel and your shop, and nothing happened. No, by thunder, you haven't even produced one airplane that some fool would buy and try to fly in."

Spencer Sutherland was growing emphatic. He no longer thudded the glass top; he looked squarely at his son, and his words fell like clods dropping on the coffin of Rock's aeronautical hopes.

"What's it all about?" he ended.

"The work I am doing is almost entirely theoretical," Rock stated patiently. "It is to determine—"

"That's it—theoretical," Spencer Sutherland interrupted. "When are you going to do something?" He arose and paced the green carpet. "Rock, you know the Sutherland family's been in the transportation

business for generations. I ducked college to take a brakeman's job.

"My father, Jason Sutherland, had more to do with the building of the Seven Rivers than any other man. And his father, Ebenezer—your great grandfather—was born before there were railroads, but *he* was in the stagecoach business, and he had the best route in New England. And now you come along, and—"

"And carry on the line," interrupted Rock. He jerked off his glasses and put them in his pocket as if preparing for physical combat. "Don't you think that aviation is a step forward?"

"Aviation, pish!" old Spencer Sutherland said violently. "It's a step sideways. It's not transportation, son. They take you somewhere in three minutes, and you spend six months in the hospital getting over it. Besides, people won't ride in airplanes, except a few sensation seekers."

Rockley was on his feet too. "You're wrong, father; you're quite wrong," he insisted. "Aviation—"

"And *you* don't even do that," Spencer said, turning on him. "You don't even try to carry people. All you do, according to Jeff Murthoe's son, is to make marks on a hunk of paper and talk to yourself.

"Then you put a toy kite in a big horn—wind tunnel, is it?—and shoot a breeze through it and watch the toy cut didoes. And once in awhile you construct an airplane, but I've never heard of one yet that ever flew anywhere but just around the field."

"The theory of the thing is everything; practice follows inevitably if theory is correct." Rock's voice rang as he pronounced his motto, his battle cry.

"Talk!" Sutherland snorted. "Rock, I tell you it's time you went to work. But I'm a fair man—or trying to be. I've given you Lord knows how many thousands a year for that field. Now it's time that I—or somebody—cut something out of it."

He paused, and looked keenly at this tall, solemn enigma of his.

"Earn some money!" he said. "There never was a transportation system worth a celluloid whoop in hades that couldn't support itself. Prove to me that people want this flying of yours, and that they'll pay for it."

"How can I—" Rockley began protestingly. His father smiled somewhat sardonically, and stopped him.

"Thought you'd say that, Rock. I cut off your pay roll money to see if I could get you here with a proper appreciation of the value of money in your head. But I see you still consider it an unimportant detail."

His father's face suddenly grew more serious. "Rock, I have a proposition to make to you. I've talked it over with Murthoe, here, for months, and I've quite decided that it's the only thing to do."

The railroad man sat down at his desk again.

"Here it is," he said tersely. "For six months more, till November third, I'll continue to give you whatever you call on me for. But instead of theoretical high jinks you must spend that money to make more money in flying—in aerial transportation. In other words, in these six months you must produce twenty-five thousand dollars. Young Murthoe will keep the books for you."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Rock Sutherland in astonishment. "You'd have me stop my work to earn such an insignificant sum as that?"

"Doesn't sound like much, does it?" his father commented grimly. "Here's the rest of the proposition: If in six months you've made that much money in flying, without exceeding your present rate of expenditure, I'll do anything you ask in the matter of starting air lines in this country."

"Damn it, I'll invest a big hunk of my capital on your say-so. Money isn't what I'm after in life. Transportation means something to me, Rock."

He stopped. His sincerity impressed his son, as he pulled out his horn-rimmed spectacles and adjusted them thoughtfully to his nose.

Sutherland went on: "But if you don't succeed, Rock—and frankly I think you'll fail miserably—then— Well, maybe I'm a fool, but I'm going in with Jeff Murthoe here on a railroad enterprise that will come pretty close to costing me my whole fortune."

Jefferson Murthoe straightened his big body in his chair and interposed hastily: "I wouldn't say that, Spencer. It isn't—"

The railroad president turned in his revolving chair to face his friend. "You needn't reassure me, Jeff; I'm not going into this thing blindly, and I do know something about railroad costs."

He swung back to confront his son.

"Rock, lots of big improvements have been made in railroads lately. But in one respect they're standing still or slipping backward—I mean in speed. Our crack trains are no faster now than they were years ago. The Century takes two hours longer to make Chicago than it did before the war. It averages only forty-eight miles an hour."

"Now, if we railroad men are going to keep up with the times, we've got to have speed, but speed with safety, too. Murthoe and I are planning to plunge on a new transcontinental line—a high-speed line. I'll skip the details, but it's big."

"It costs about half a million a mile to lay ordinary track in this country, and this track of ours is more costly still. The railroads use a mighty narrow gauge for a broad-gauge country like America, Rock. It was adopted a long time ago, when we knew nothing of either power or speed. But the man who tries to change it isolates his rolling stock, and sets himself up against every other railroad in the country."

Spencer Sutherland stopped speaking, and stared out of the window as if he saw visions in the smoky air above the busy harbor.

"Anyhow, Rock, this track will be built for sustained speeds as high as a hundred and twenty miles an hour, and our rolling stock will be built to stand the racket of that speed."

Rockley Sutherland sat motionless, endeavoring to marshal some convincing rejoinder to a man who thought two miles a minute was speed. A tithe of the money his father would spend would spread a network of safe, unbelievably swift air lines across the country! These lines would reduce America's vast distances comparatively to those of New England.

He got to his feet, and his voice shook:

"Are you aware, father, that airplanes, though not twenty-five years in existence, have already made speeds double one hundred and twenty miles an hour? Do you know what could be done in commercial aviation if—"

His father rose too, and laid a hand on Rock's shoulder.

"Well, there you are, son. The Sutherland family's going ahead in the transportation business—one way or another. You show me I'm wrong, and I'll be the—I won't say goat, son—but I'll be the visionary to back flying."

"But if you don't—well, all the money in the Sutherland family is going to be sunk in a new railroading stunt that won't pay a cent for a generation, maybe, but will write the Sutherland name big in the history of transportation."

"I'll do it!" Rock exclaimed, and he whipped his glasses off his nose and almost broke the frames in his clenching hand.

"Good boy!" exclaimed Spencer Sutherland, moved by the sudden flash of determination in this peculiar son of his. He thumped Rockley gently on the back. "Go to it, and good luck. Give me hell—if you can. Make your own rules, but for Pete's sake keep those owl glasses in your pocket and peel off your coat."

Jefferson Murthoe came forward, too, and again extended his big, soft hand with hearty good will. "I wish you luck, boy, even if this new transcontinental road is close to my heart."

Rock Sutherland was impressed. He knew Murthoe for a dyed-in-the-wool railroad man, his father's lieutenant for many years, and realized how much the words must have cost him.

"That's very—very decent of you, sir," he replied. "I can't help feeling I'm right, but—there's room for more than one opinion in the world. Maybe—I don't say positively, but maybe we'll need a new transcontinental line some day to carry slow freight at two miles a minute."

## II

WHEN Rock left the train at his station and looked about for Mike Rice he was still bubbling over with the thought of the system of airlines that his father had practically agreed to finance in six months' time. Already he had worked out, in his own mind, the details of a monoplane Pullman in which parasitic resistance was reduced to the absolute minimum, and baggage and fuel were carried in the thick, streamlined wing.

He was impatient to get back to his office and do a little figuring on this new ship, and the fact that Mike was not there was irritating in the extreme.

"Here I am," said a voice behind him. He turned quickly. It was not Rice, but a girl—a slim, brown-faced creature, with a hint of the *retroussé* about her sunburned nose. Her eyes, also brown, were larger than was necessary.

They were as usual lit by some secret

and delicious bit of amusement. She was clad in an airy tennis frock, and her hair had been bobbed, and now, apparently was in the process of growing again.

"Hello, Doris," said Rock, peering anxiously past her. Miss Doris Earlston had been too ordinary a part of his world for twenty-five years to require much politeness. "Haven't seen Mike, have you?"

"I have," replied Doris, not in the least put out by Rock's lack of enthusiasm. "I sent him back to Soundview."

Rockley immediately bestowed his complete attention upon her.

"You what?" he asked severely.

"I sent him back to Soundview," the girl repeated, quite calmly. "You see, I buzzed over there to see you, and they told me you were in town; so I chased down here, sent Mike home, and here we are."

"Oh, you're going to take me back," said Rock, relieved. "Very well, let's start."

The girl silently led him to her smart dark blue roadster, and slipped into the driver's seat. Rock followed. She started the motor, and then quite calmly turned the car in the direction precisely opposite to that which led to his flying headquarters at Soundview.

"Look here, Doris," he protested, "none of this! I've simply got to get back to the office at once."

"Don't be silly, Rock," the girl rebuked him. "This is your birthday, and I'm going to take you for an airing to get the moths out of you, and later you're going to take me to dinner."

"No, really I can't, Doris," he asserted emphatically. "I haven't the time. I've got to get busy at once."

"How late did you work last night?" the girl inquired judiciously, glancing at his white, tired features.

"Well, rather late, but—"

"I thought so," she said. "You're looking as pale as a toadstool. No, Rock; you're going for an airing. If you don't want to go in a car I'll take you up in my flying boat. Jim Penturn says I'll be a very good aviatrix, one of these days."

"But look here!" Rockley persisted, and poured out the wonderful news about the boon commercial aviation was to receive from his father.

Doris listened intently, and at the end she wrinkled her nose.

"Tell me that part about the twenty-five thousand dollars again," she requested.

"Oh, he's made it contingent on my earning twenty-thousand in flying in six months," he explained. "But, Doris—I have already a most interesting idea about a twenty-passenger aerial pull—"

Doris burst into laughter—spontaneous, rippling laughter like that of a child.

"Oh, dear!" she gasped, and needed all her will to keep the car on the road.

"What's the matter?" demanded Rock, training his formidable glasses on her. "What's so funny?"

"You talk just as if you thought you could earn that money," she said, when she could speak. "Why—" and she was off in another gale of merriment.

"Do you mean to say you think that I cannot make a profit of twenty-five thousand dollars in six months out of some aeronautical venture?" he inquired incredulously.

"Why, of course you can't!" she exclaimed. "I never heard anything so ridiculous. Didn't you realize your father was spoofing you?"

Rock was dazed by this viewpoint.

"Why—why—" he stammered.

"You couldn't even support yourself for six months," she said. "That's why he's continuing to pay all your expenses for that time.

"But after that, when he puts all his money into that Murthoe's railroad, you'll have to take some job where you can fuss around with figures and curves, and stresses and things, at about thirty-five dollars a week. It's too bad, Rock; really, I'm sorry, even if I did laugh."

She was sober now, and her brown eyes were commiserating, insultingly compassionate.

"This—this is incredible," Rock exclaimed. "You really mean to say—seriously—that I couldn't—"

"How could you?" asked the girl promptly.

"Why—" He stopped, and made incoherent gestures with both hands to indicate the multitude of ways in which twenty-five thousand dollars could be earned in aeronautics in six months.

"Go on—how?" she prompted, refusing to comprehend his explanatory movements.

He watched the road reeling under the car for a moment.

"Well, of course I would have to spend

a short time determining some course of action," he conceded at last.

"Oh, Rock, you never in this world could do it," she said seriously, and his eyes evaded hers. "If I were you I'd dismiss the technical men and those mechanics who never seem to do anything, and close down now.

"Perhaps your father would give you the six months' allowance to invest. Then you wouldn't starve to death, even if he did sink his whole fortune in this new enterprise."

"Do you mean to tell me that you think I would quit like that—quit when I have a good chance of diverting my father's wealth into channels that would set aviation ahead ten years in this country?" His manner was outraged; his voice trembled.

"Wouldn't you?" she asked quite innocently.

"I would not!" he said with determination. "Now," he added coldly, "you will kindly turn this car around and take me to Soundview. I will hold my ideas on the monoplane in abeyance while I consider the matter of the twenty-five thousand dollars. I thank you for calling attention to that—that detail—so forcibly. But turn—at once!"

Meekly she stopped the roadster, and backed around. He glanced uneasily at her; meekness in Doris was unusual, and somewhat disturbing.

"Look here," he said, and touched her round arm rather awkwardly, with his forefinger. "I didn't mean to be severe with you, Doris. You come over to-morrow morning, and I'll tell you just how I'm going to get that money."

"I will, Rock," she promised. "I want to see Darcy Murthoe and Jimmy Penturn anyhow, to ask them to come to our place for the week-end. Jim's been awfully nice about teaching me to fly my little seaplane."

Rock frowned. "We'll probably be somewhat busy from now on," he said, "but—well, I suppose if you want them you'll have to have them. I must do the preliminary planning myself, at any rate."

Quite inexplicably the girl nestled closer to him for just an instant, to the detriment of her steering.

"You're quite the nicest, most conceited old dodo I know, Rock," she said with dancing eyes. "I'm hoping you aren't quite as extinct as you seem, but—" Her



face lost all its cheer in an instant, and became most pensive—"I'm afraid you're so dead you don't even know it yourself."

### III

WHEN they arrived at Soundview, Rock hastened to get rid of Doris as speedily as possible, which was no speedier than that young lady desired her dismissal to be. Darcy Murthoe and Jim Penturn, the latter Rock's test pilot, flanked the roadster as soon as Rockley himself left it.

Alone and thoughtful, Rock abandoned his office, the realm of the theoretical, where airplanes raced the sun on blue prints and carried unbelievably useful loads to altitudes as yet unattained in the world outside the limits of the room.

He walked past the laboratory, with its big wind tunnel and its machines for the study of stresses, and came to the workshop. This was usually the limit of his territory, but this evening he walked beyond it, to three hangars.

Into one of these he stepped, and regarded with critical eyes the airplane it housed. This was the Falcon, the latest of the series of speed ships he had designed.

Like most fast planes the Falcon did not look like anything very much. She consisted of a rather short, thick wing, the center of which melted in smooth curves into the forward part of a very stubby fuselage, or body.

A short distance in front of the wing the motor, in the nose of the fuselage, occupied a great deal of space; for it was of six hundred horsepower, and an engine that produces such power must have room.

The pilot, on the other hand, was not so important in Rock Sutherland's reckoning, and consequently his cockpit, behind the wing in the part of the fuselage that narrows toward the tail, was none too commodious.

The machine rested upon two small wheels with thick pneumatic tires which, with their attendant stream-lined struts, made up the landing gear.

It was upon the landing wheels and struts that Rock Sutherland based his belief that he had in the Falcon constructed the world's fastest ship.

There was, in that narrow cockpit, a sort of windlass handle wherewith the pilot, once in the air, could reel up landing wheels and struts into notches cut in the bottom of the fuselage. Thus the great resistance

offered by the landing gear to the passage of the plane through the air was entirely done away with.

The only reason why it had not shot through the sky at some terrific rate like four or five miles a minute was that shortly after it emerged from the blue print stage to actuality, Sutherland was struck by a number of improvements which might be made, and consequently had straightway set to work upon a new ship with such zeal that he had no time whatsoever to witness a test of the Falcon.

But now he looked upon the ship with calculating eyes, not as a triumph of the science of aeronautical engineering, but as a possible instrument for the earning of twenty-five thousand dollars.

But somehow the Falcon was lacking. True, it could shoot through the air at terrific speed, but it could transport only a pilot—a thin pilot, and no freight and no passengers.

"The fastest plane in the world," Rock murmured, his tone quite positive. He wandered on, and in the next hangar he discovered something that looked better, commercially—a ship designed to carry a passenger and a pilot at a speed that would make a "fast" railroad train resemble a snail crawling backward.

That, at least, had some value as an instrument of transportation. It was in this machine that Jim Penturn had taught Doris to fly land machines; later he had given her lessons in flying a low-powered seaplane her father had permitted her to own.

In the third hangar was another plane, a big, two-motored biplane which could carry ten passengers from dawn to dusk without renewal of its gasoline supply. That looked good too.

Down at the water's edge, housed in one big hangar, were three other craft, seaplanes, all speedy, and all carrying more than one person. One of these was the Albatross, a monster two-motored metal flying boat capable of carrying several tons of fuel or freight, but it was not as fast as Rock had figured it should be.

Another, the one of which Rock was proudest, was an amphibian—a monoplane, with boat hull, into which fitted a retractable structure with wheels for landing on the ground.

The principle was the same as the Falcon's—a windlass in the pilot's cockpit.



Rock did not visit these seaplanes. His intense thought slowed him down, and finally halted him in front of the land plane hangars.

The six aircraft were Rock's stock in trade. He sighed as he thought of all the beautiful ships adorning blue prints in his office. But he must wait six months—or at least until he had amassed twenty-five thousand dollars—before he could work further on them. It was a decided nuisance.

And he must arrive at some decision before to-morrow morning as to what method he must use to obtain this sum. He went back and climbed into the cockpit of the two-seater. The leather cushion was dusty.

"Let me see," he said—for Rock was accustomed to addressing himself, and found himself eminently satisfactory as both auditor and speaker. "Twenty-five thousand dollars. How do people earn money in a hurry?"

He could get no start on the matter, which was rather peculiar; for Rock's brain had a way of tackling most vigorously any problem that he brought it to bear on.

His head grew hot—no unusual thing for Rock—except that it grew hot without any spurt of progress toward his destination. That was queer. He continued to think, and at every moment the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars grew more remote.

He came to realize vaguely the limitations of the theorist in this practical world. His self-esteem was shaken; and a rising panic smote him.

What if Doris Earlston was right—what if he could not earn twenty-five thousand dollars in six months? He saw his father pouring out the millions that should go to flying upon a useless band of steel, stretching from one ocean to the other.

If he failed to get that money, he himself would be the worst enemy of aviation; for he would be ruining its great chance to become in one stride a real factor—the big factor—in modern transportation.

In a fever he climbed out of the cockpit and left the hangar. He strode along, head hanging low, wrestling with his mounting fear, that such an impractical ass as he was entirely incompetent to make any money at all.

"Don't run over us, Rock!" exclaimed a warning voice.

He looked up and discovered that his

rambling legs had led him directly to the roadster where Doris sat, still with Darcy Murthoe standing on one side of the car and Jim Penturn leaning against the door on the other. Jim usually was leaning against something if there was nothing to sit on in sight.

Rockley said nothing, blinking at them while he struggled with his disarranged thoughts.

"I was just telling Miss Earlston how I won the Burnham Cup in 1923," said Jim, turning leisurely to include his employer in the conversation. "That was before I came with you, Rock. It certainly was a tough race, and we traveled, too. A hundred and ninety-six miles an hour was my speed for the distance—two hundred miles over a triangular course."

"And just think," said Doris, "although that was only three years ago, the winner this time will undoubtedly have to do at least fifty miles an hour faster than that to win. I've never gone within a hundred and fifty miles an hour of that in my little seaplane."

"That's fast—quite fast, for a girl," Darcy Murthoe said gallantly, feeling for his trim mustache.

"It's fast for some men, too," Jim Penturn retorted, looking fixedly at the business manager. "I certainly enjoyed winning that race," he continued, reflectively. "Went up to Maine afterward, and did some fishing for seven weeks."

"Didn't catch anything—forgot to put a hook on, or something—but I certainly got a nice rest. I sleep fine in a boat. And if I hadn't been foolish enough to take a brother-in-law's advice about an oil company, I might have been resting yet. Yes, sir, the pilot's share of the prize money was ten thousand dollars, and it should have been fifteen."

"What did you say about money?" Rock inquired, coming out of his reverie abruptly.

"I said I should have got fifteen thousand, instead of ten," Jim Penturn asserted argumentatively. "As it was the Smithsonian Company got twenty-five thousand dollars prize money, and some big contracts for the army for the way I handled their ship."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Rock. A radiant smile broke over his countenance, as he looked at Doris's animated face. "Jim, you're going to have

an opportunity to win that cup again this year."

The test pilot laughed. "What with?" he inquired. "That race is held in two weeks anyhow. It's too late to get in."

"Find out if the entries have closed, will you, Darcy?" Rock requested. "You can do it by telephone to Mineola."

Darcy stared at his employer and then at Penturn, whose eyes were likewise glued to Rockley's. Slowly he turned toward the office.

Jim Penturn ceased to lean against the door of the roadster.

"Jim, I'm entering the Falcon—the fastest ship in the world. We'll win easily."

With a grunt that was almost a groan, Jim Penturn sank to a seat on the running board, and buried his face in his hands.

"Be reasonable, boss," he urged without looking up. "Let's just call that ship the fastest in the world, and let it go at that. Don't let's go busting our illusions all to crumbs by entering her in a race."

Rockley Sutherland's face gradually reddened. "You don't believe that plane's fast, Jimmy?" he inquired.

"Oh, it's fast, all right, on paper, Rock," Jimmy conceded. "But look here, when you get her up in the air and start reeling in that landing gear—why, man, she's just a fast trip to the cemetery—that's all she is."

"Her factor of safety," said Sutherland coldly, "is—"

"Let's assume it's ten," retorted Jimmy, raising his head. "But, man, if the motor quits when that landing gear is reeled up into the fuselage, you're going to hit the ground, and you're going to hit it just like a twelve-inch shell."

"I thought you were my test pilot, Jim," the lanky engineer said quietly.

Jimmy sighed with real regret.

"Oh, I am—or maybe I'd better say I was, but my engagement was going to terminate any time you asked me to take the Falcon up and reel in her landing gear. It's a hell—beg pardon—heck—of a beautiful theory, but theories have killed more people than stunting in aviation, and I'm just so much a creature of habit that I aspire to keep on living, Rock."

"You oughtn't to send any one up in the air with an unsafe ship like that, Rock," Doris chided.

"It isn't unsafe!" Rockley declared emphatically. "It's considerably safer than

the average racing ship. Why, I'd fly it myself without an instant's hesitation!"

Doris Earlston leaned over the side of her car and smiled provocatively into Rock's face.

"Well, why don't you, then?" she inquired sweetly. "You're a pilot, aren't you?"

"You know that I learned merely because I believed that an engineer should have the pilot's view of aviation, and that I have not been up in the air for several years," Rockley replied with dignity.

"Well, of course, if you did want to earn some money you have two weeks to get back into trim," the girl said almost tauntingly.

Rock looked toward the office, from which Darcy Murthoe was emerging. Darcy walked without haste toward them, and the engineer awaited his approach in silence.

"They'll take entries up to within a week of the race," Murthoe reported.

Sutherland turned to the girl.

"I'll do it!" he said. "There isn't a ship I ever designed that isn't safe, and I'm going to get that twenty-five thousand dollars—and more!"

Jimmy Penturn arose pensively. "It was a nice restful job while it lasted, Rock," he said mournfully, and strolled toward his living quarters to pack his outfit.

"Don't be ridiculous, Rock," said Doris Earlston reprovingly. "You couldn't fly in that funny-looking plane of yours against real pilots, in real planes."

Rockley Sutherland's jaw, not ordinarily the most prominent feature of his countenance, slowly assumed larger proportions.

But Doris laughed at him, waved her hand gayly, and shot off.

Murthoe, who had been staring at him carefully, now approached.

"Look here, Rock; if you really are going to fly that plane I know a pilot out of a job—fellow named Grimpen—who'll get you in trim for it."

"Tell him to come to the field tomorrow, as early as he can make it," Sutherland said grimly. "He may have a risky job on his hands, for I'm afraid I'm rather rusty at the controls."

#### IV

DARCY MURTHOE also paid a visit to New York on the occasion of Rock's thirtieth birthday. He left that evening, short-

ly after his employer had arrived at his sudden and startling decision.

In New York he taxied directly to a Park Avenue apartment house that was considerably more ornate than its neighbors, which is saying all that can be said for pretentious elegance in stone, and walked in upon his father.

Jefferson Murthoe was comfortably immersed in a leather easy-chair that seemed to have been designed for his large figure. He was looking at the ceiling when Darcy entered, but he lowered his eyes long enough to take in the figure of his son, less massive than his own but by no means slender.

Then he resumed his contemplation of the ceiling. It was a very good ceiling, but it is doubtful if it merited the keen scrutiny that Murthoe, Sr., bestowed upon its surface.

"Well, I heard enough at Soundview to figure that you'd put the transcontinental over, but Rock himself didn't say a word to me about the proposition," Darcy said, drawing a chair close to the reposing form of his father. "And what do you think the blithering idiot is going to do—he's going to enter one of his speed ships in the Burnham Cup and fly it himself!"

Murthoe considered this statement at length, before replying:

"Fast plane?"

"So fast that it will win that cup—if it should finish," declared Darcy Murthoe emphatically. All the doubt that had been in his voice when he had spoken of the Falcon that morning was gone. "And that means thirty or forty thousand prize money."

"I'd hate to see him even start," said big Jefferson Murthoe, and his eyes left the ceiling to dwell for an instant intently upon Darcy's, before they wandered on, out of the window, across Park Avenue to another edifice.

"Well—" said Darcy slowly. "I'll think about it."

"Don't think," curtly directed Murthoe, Sr. "I'm doing that. Act!"

"I don't want to do anything that will look too fishy," Darcy objected. "You don't want him to suspect me, do you?"

Jefferson Murthoe leaned forward in his chair, his jaw set and his eyes acutely keen under his contracted, bushy eyebrows as he surveyed his son.

"That's the big point," he warned.

"You've got to keep under cover, Darcy. You've got to be his best friend—until we're ready to throw the iron into them both. Keep out of it yourself; be at his elbow watching him, while somebody else is—ah—making certain that he isn't going to win the race."

Darcy nodded. "It's safer," he admitted. "And I think I know the man we can use—a pilot who was court-martialed and kicked out of the navy for using a naval plane to carry stuff in from Bimini for a bootlegger."

"His name's Jake Grimpen, and he's down and out. With Jim Penturn leaving, I think I can get Rock to take him on as test pilot."

Jefferson Murthoe shook his head. "We don't want him. I've got the fellow we need all picked out, and I've got him where I want him, too. They're looking for him on that Seven Rivers mail-car holdup. He shot a mail clerk. The bandits got away in a plane—his plane. I'm the only man that can keep him out of jail."

Darcy Murthoe stared intently at his father, and his mouth sagged in astonishment.

"You—" he began slowly; but the big man in the armchair silenced him with a glare.

"We're talking about a man to keep Rock in trouble," Jefferson Murthoe said coldly. "You don't suppose I countenance train robbers, do you? I happened to get my hands on this fellow Ward by chance. He's more than just a pilot; the man's clever, and a quick thinker, and he's not afraid of action—if there's enough in it for him."

Darcy Murthoe moved uneasily.

"I said a word or two to Rock about Grimpen," he said hesitantly. "In fact, Rock told me to send him around to-morrow. Of course I—"

He stopped, as Jefferson Murthoe snarled at him.

"Hell!" he snapped. "You'll have to let Rock talk to Grimpen, I suppose. If he doesn't take him, we'll send Ward to him. Perhaps—"

He stopped, and directed that unexpressionless stare of his upward. "All right!" he said emphatically, as one who had made a decision. "Get Grimpen the job. I'll hold Ward in reserve—we might need somebody Rock had never seen in a hurry some day."

His son frowned. "We don't want too many—" he started, but Jefferson Murthoe leaned over and gripped him by the arm with his big, soft hand.

"This is big," he said, and there was great earnestness in his voice, "and we've got to handle it in a big way. Sutherland will put the whole matter of right of way and construction of the road in my hands—all of it—for he's going to devote himself to raising the money. That means millions, right there—millions. We simply make him pay through the nose for all the land for track, yards, shops, stations, everything.

"And when he's cashing in on his Seven Rivers stock we'll sell it short right ahead of him, and every point it drops will mean big money for us. When he and his friends are about cleaned out and his bankers are howling murder—"

He paused and contemplated the prospect, which appeared to spread itself on the spotless plaster above him. "Well, we'll control the Seven Rivers, a paying road, and he'll control a couple of streaks of rust stretching part way across the country. I'll be the big boss—after years of taking orders, like a clerk, and he—damn him—will be begging me for a job."

He chuckled, and his heavy stomach heaved with his mirth. It was precisely the same chuckle that had given Jeff Murthoe a wide reputation for good nature down town, and there was nothing in his broad face to indicate the hell of thwarted, overweening ambition, insatiable greed and black treachery that, like toadstools in the dark, had been flourishing for years beneath that amiable exterior.

Suppression of his emotions had become an unbreakable habit with Jeff Murthoe, but always he looked forward to the day when he need no longer mask them. Only his son had had glimpses of his real self, and the son was too much occupied with his own welfare to realize to the full the depth of his father's nature, or its baseness.

"But won't old Sutherland shy off, as the costs mount high above the estimates?" asked Darcy.

"Not he," replied his father emphatically. "He'll plug on harder than ever. He's simply obsessed by this idea of progressing transportation—wants to help it on like that damn father and grandfather he boasts about. He expects to lose money, the fool!"

He fastened his small bright eyes on Darcy's face once more.

"Don't you worry about any of this—don't even think of it," he directed. "Your job—your only job—is to stick like glue to young Sutherland, and any time he sees a chance to make twenty-five thousand, you step on it—and step hard. He's the crux of the whole situation."

Darcy grinned, revealing his teeth for just an instant.

"You needn't worry much about Rock Sutherland's developing anything practical in transportation—aërial or otherwise. His forte is sitting down at a table and putting marvelous dreams on paper."

"He comes of a damn practical family," Murthoe commented a shade uneasily.

"Well, he's never given any indication of it."

"Yet he entered this race," said Jeff Murthoe.

"I talked with Jim Penturn about that before I left the field. He said that Doris Earlston rather geyed him into doing that when Penturn refused to fly it."

"Now you're beginning to tell me something, young man," said Jefferson Murthoe, shifting himself about in his chair to send one of those sharp glances of his at his son. "Why did Penturn refuse to fly it?"

"Oh, Penturn's afraid of the landing gear. It reels up into the fuselage, reducing the air resistance of the plane. He resigned rather than try it out."

"Huh!" remarked the old man thoughtfully. "What was this Earlston girl doing at the field?"

"She came over to invite Penturn and me to spend the week-end at her father's place," Darcy Murthoe replied.

"And she didn't invite Rock, eh?" mused his father. "Comes around there quite often—to see you and Penturn, doesn't she?"

Darcy looked across at his parent in some surprise. "Why, yes, she does," he admitted, and unconsciously his hand rose to touch the end of his mustache.

"You poor simpleton, you!" growled his father with sudden vehemence. "Don't you know that when a girl gives one reason for doing a thing like that she generally has another?"

Darcy got to his feet and shook his head emphatically.

"You're dead wrong about that," he said. Moved by some hidden emotion he



roved restlessly over to the window. "She's known Rock since he was a baby—her people's estate adjoins Soundview, you know—but she's never done anything but make fun of him, and twit him about his absent-mindedness and abstraction, as long as I've been there.

"She did it to-day—she fairly plagued him into deciding to fly in the race himself. And she knows he hasn't flown for years. That doesn't look as if she were much interested in him, now, does it? She isn't, I tell you.

"As a matter of fact"—he turned away from the window and walked toward his father with a complacent smile on his face—"although she asks Penturn over to her place every time she asks me, she seems to be a bit more pleased with my society than she is with his. You may have a daughter as well as a son some day."

"It's a good family—a damn good family," remarked Murthoe thoughtfully. "Yes, with the Seven Rivers railroad and an Earlston in the family we'd be pretty well fixed, financially and socially."

"You attend to the railroad, and I'll attend to Rock Sutherland—and the girl," went on Darcy confidently. Then, quite unexpectedly, he scowled. "You know, I've been acting as business manager for him at that confounded dream factory for years, and although the pickings have been good, I'm sick of it.

"He's so infernally sure that everything he puts down on paper is just right, and he's so wrapped up in his work that he isn't a regular human being. He's a precise ass.

"It will be a real pleasure to jolt him off his perch and make him scramble in the mud for a living, like the rest of us. Only when that happens"—he erased the frown and showed his teeth again—"we won't be scrambling any more."

### V

VERY reluctantly, and yet without hesitation, Rock Sutherland laid aside his sober, almost threadbare gray suit, and emerged on Soundview Field clad in the flannel shirt and khaki knickers that he had worn while learning to fly several years before.

Having announced his intention of racing for the Burnham Cup, he had no thought of withdrawing, and he accordingly devoted himself assiduously to the matter

of regaining that impalpable but most necessary thing that pilots call "the feel of the air."

Jim Penturn having taken himself away from Soundview and started a lazy angling for a testing job with a Mineola airplane manufacturer, Sutherland engaged the services of Jake Grimpen on the warm recommendation of Darcy.

Grimpen was a seedy, dark-skinned young man, who said little and appeared to be occupied chiefly with his own thoughts, which did not seem to be pleasant. As Darcy had not told Rock that his candidate for the post of test pilot had been dishonorably discharged from the navy, Rock had no way of knowing the reason for Grimpen's gloom and his rather evasive and shifty manner.

However, as Grimpen was obviously a good pilot, and forgot his sulks in the air, Rock did not hesitate to retain him. Daily he and Grimpen flew in Rockley's speedy dual control two-seater. Although Rock was much out of practice, his faculty of intense concentration soon enabled him to acquire again the knack of handling the stick and rudder bar.

In less than a week Sutherland approached the matter of flying the Falcon, which was twice as fast as the two-seater and considerably harder to control.

Doris flew over in her little brown mahogany flying boat for his first flight in the speed ship, and viewed proceedings with as flippant an eye as usual.

"Are you really as afraid of it as you look, Rock?" she asked the tall young experimenter as he gingerly wedged himself into the narrow cockpit. Rockley took off his goggles—the spectacles had temporarily gone into the discard, along with the blue prints—and gazed at her sternly.

"While I must admit that I entertain a certain amount of apprehension," he said firmly, "your use of the word 'afraid' is quite incorrect, Doris."

"I'll know about that later," she replied saucily. "Only for goodness' sake don't tremble too much!"

Rock did not answer. Instead he addressed the mechanics who stood in front of the machine, eying the six hundred horse power motor with grim determination and a vast amount of respect. It takes effort to start a motor of that size, and agility to get out of the propeller's way when it does begin work.



"Switch off," he said.

They turned the propeller over, drawing into the cylinders of the quiescent engine a charge of gasoline vapor. "Contact!" he barked, switching on the ignition. The three mechanics linked themselves together, hand to hand, and one of them laid a cautious hand on the propeller.

They swayed together back and forth, and then, at a muttered word from the man whose hand gripped the propeller, they charged swiftly away. The propeller made a slow half-turn under their combined tug. Then came a sudden explosion from the motor, and the big stick whirled into complete invisibility.

A mechanic dived for each short, stubby wing, and the third for the tail. Digging their feet into the turf they hung on desperately, while Rock warmed up the motor. The speed machine strained like a tiger in leash at the chocks under its wheels, and against the strength of the three men holding it.

The blast of the propeller literally tore up the dirt behind and beneath the ship, and sent it shooting backward, a blinding cloud of dust. It was a stunning exhibition of concentrated power.

Finally Rock throttled down again, and raised a hand. With considerable relief the mechanics relaxed their holds; the wooden blocks were jerked from beneath the wheels, and the machine moved slowly forward. Rock headed the queer-looking little ship into the wind, and his hand moved toward the throttle.

She was away! Like nothing else on land or sea, the plane swept forward over the level field, a thing of terrific noise and speed. The tremendous lash of the propeller lifted her into the air after only a short run.

For an instant she hung level over the ground—the prey of the conflicting forces of gravity and gasoline. Then gasoline won, and she shot forward at redoubled speed, and contracted into a mere dot as she roared out over the Sound. Doris stood motionless, watching the tremendous progress of that man-carrying projectile.

"It certainly can travel," said a voice at her elbow, but she did not look around.

Darcy Murthoe did not speak again. He, too, was watching. The plane was turning, and now that it no longer sped directly away from the field, some idea of its real movement could be discerned.

It traversed the distant blue sky at such a rate that the eye refused to credit the thing, and brought the sky itself nearer, by some optical trick.

In a great circle the Falcon fled, and then flashed by across the field again, a blurred thing, almost impalpable, at its closest point to them. But Doris's keen eyes, following it, with the aid of turning head and turning body, made out one thing. The landing wheels were gone; during that sweep around the circle, Rock, there, in his tiny compartment, had been able to reel up the retractable gear.

Again the Falcon swept around that great, circular course, and again it approached the field. This time, as it drew nearer it was traveling perceptibly slower, and the landing wheels and struts showed beneath the body of the machine.

As soon as it neared the edge of the field the fury of the speed lessened, and the plane swept along close above the ground. This was the ticklish moment, for Rock must set the wheels of the ship upon the field while it still was traveling at a mile and a half a minute.

The plane ate up more than half of the field, seemingly in one lunge, before they saw the wheels touch, the machine leap upward, like a nervous horse, and then drop again, finally accepting the embrace of the ground and gliding along it like a racing car. The three mechanics shouted in unison. An instant later it had stopped, and then Rock turned it toward them and taxied slowly along.

His face, as he removed his goggles, was incredibly old and drained white. He slowly extricated himself from the cockpit and walked toward Doris.

"I withdraw my remark concerning your use of the word 'afraid,' Doris," he said with a lame attempt at a smile. "I didn't believe a man could be quite so frightened as I was during that flight."

Doris said nothing for a time, though she had parted her lips to speak as he approached. Finally she laughed, and remarked almost carelessly:

"I knew you would be, Rock. I suppose this has convinced you what utter nonsense it would be to attempt to fly against real racing pilots in the Burnham Cup?"

His face became twisted into lines of perplexity as he surveyed her. Doris always did puzzle him.

"On the contrary," he said quite slowly.

"I am more than ever determined to win that race. The Falcon has the quality; I must endeavor to equal her in that respect."

Again the girl's impish laugh sounded in Rock's ears.

"How noble—and how daring, Rock! I do hope they have excellent ambulance service at the race."

He smiled slowly, almost indulgently, at this, and a glint of humor appeared in his eyes.

"You underestimate the meaning of an accident at four miles a minute, Doris," he replied. "Not for a moment do I concede the possibility of a crash, but should there be one with that landing gear reeled up, an ambulance would be as competent to cope with the situation as a fire extinguisher with Vesuvius."

Something of the girl's mirth left her face, and she turned away from Rock for an instant to address a remark to Darcy Murthoe. But Darcy was not there. He had walked over to the Falcon and was listening intently as a mechanic explained the working of the retractable landing gear.

Rock's eyes followed the girl's, and in some astonishment he commented:

"Look at that, Doris! Even Darcy has become interested in the Falcon, although I have never before succeeded with any of my planes in capturing his attention. I consider it a good omen that the speed plane is so remarkable it holds him enthralled."

"He certainly is absorbed in it," Doris Earlston conceded, but there was much less gratification in her tone than in Rock's, although she shared his wonder. "Hasn't he ever helped you in your designing work?"

"Not Darcy," replied Rock good-humoredly. "He is invaluable in handling the business part of this unbusinesslike enterprise, paying the bills, doing the book-keeping, ordering material, keeping track of our future needs, and managing the personnel, but he has never gone beyond that."

"Never until now," corrected Doris. "He's a good deal like his father in that respect; I mean, his father has never had a great deal of practical railroading experience, has he?"

"Well, no," replied Rock. "I believe Jefferson Murthoe doesn't ordinarily concern himself with the engineering and op-

erating ends, although I am not well informed in the matter. But he is to play a vast part, nevertheless, in the high-speed transcontinental road, I understand—if I fail and it is constructed. Indeed it was he who called my father's attention to the growing need for such an undertaking."

"Oh," said Doris. The exclamation was quite obviously a request for more information along the same line; but Rock did not go in. He became occupied in studying the Falcon and the mechanics about it.

The girl left his side, and moved nearer to the plane, and incidentally to Murthoe. He turned quickly, as she approached him, and smiled in eager welcome.

"How fast do you think the Falcon flew, Darcy?" she asked him.

"Getting the exact speed is a decidedly intricate process, I understand," he replied, "but certainly she flew faster than any other plane I've seen in the air."

"Fast enough to win the Burnham Cup and the prize money?" she asked. "Rock's told you about what it means to him, and to flying, hasn't he?"

Darcy hesitated momentarily. "Yes, he has told me, and I'm backing him, of course," he said. "I can't even guess whether he's likely to win the cup."

Doris glanced around at Rock Sutherland. He was walking toward his office, his long legs moving rapidly, as if he contemplated stealing an hour from flying for engineering.

"I do hate the idea of his risking his life, and all to no purpose," replied the girl. "Personally I don't believe he has the slightest chance of winning."

His eyes searched her candid face. "He is taking a risk," he conceded. "As for winning—I don't know. But of course I hope he does. You understand, Doris, that I'm very much on Rock's side in this battle of railroad and airplane?" His tone was emphatic, and his eyes were still upon her.

"You don't think that I'd even doubt that, do you?" she asked.

"No, no," Darcy said hastily. "Of course not. We're all rooting hard for Rock, aren't we?"

Doris suppressed something very like a yawn. "I'm not, particularly," she replied. "Rock's such a dreamer, and after all, a transcontinental railroad is a very much more tangible thing, and a more necessary thing, than a lot of uncertain air lines that no one would use."

"You think that?" demanded Murthoe, his voice almost incredulous. He moved a step toward her.

Doris laughed gayly, and withdrew a step in mock apprehension. "We won't quarrel about it, Darcy," she said. "I've got to go now. Come over some evening and remove a little of the tedium of a poor girl's life."

She took the few steps toward her car and was in it before he could say any more. She put her foot on the starter and shot away with a wave of her hand. When the car was out of sight Darcy Murthoe turned toward Rock's office, and a pleased smile lit his countenance.

"Never even said good-by to him," he remarked to himself. "That's a good sign. And she has no faith in him! That's another."

## VI

ON the evening before the day on which the Burnham Cup was to be won the sun did not set until long after eight, but weary mechanics, who had arisen at dawn, still toiled over recalcitrant motors on the huge field at Mineola.

On the next day men were confidently expected to move above the earth faster than men had ever moved before, toward a goal that was blazing with glory and crusted with gold. The struggle of speed had called forth from the minds of aeronautical engineers throughout the world creations that were little more than motors, terrific in power, and supported in the air largely by that power, instead of by wing spread.

The race would go, in all human probability, to the machine whose supporting surface was most cunningly devised to permit the best control of that hurtling engine. It was, in short, a battle of men astride motor weighing half a ton or more, with nothing but gasoline power between men and the relentless grip of gravity.

The racing plane is by far the most delicate of all human creations for speed, and this explains why men labored late that evening, on field and in hangar. Everything had been done a week before that could be done, seemingly, yet everything had been done again that day, and would be done once more on the following morning.

Every one of these monsters of speed had a score of servants and sycophants, and

every one of these had been taxed to the utmost in patience, wisdom and dexterity that day.

To the surprise of the men from Soundview Field, Jim Penturn, who had vanished from their ken after his refusal to fly the Falcon, had that day strolled casually up to the plane, and leaning comfortably on his cane, had given divers valuable suggestions and directions in the matter of tuning her up.

Rock Sutherland, only, understood why Jim had come, for he, too, knew the lure of racing craft, although to him planes had always appeared more beautiful on paper than in actuality. He greeted the ex-test pilot in his usual rather solemn way, and received his advice with attention. Jim Penturn knew the game; only an incurable laziness stood in the way of his becoming the keenest of all racing men.

"I've had lots of luck since I left you fellows," Jim said with a grin, to Rock and Darcy Murthoe. "Nobody wants a test pilot just now, so they tell me when I call up; so I've been resting peacefully. If a man can't find work he's just got to grin and bear it, hasn't he?" He smiled pleasantly, to indicate the kind of grin he meant.

Rock smiled in response, although his face was careworn, and his whole body weary from his unaccustomed efforts on the field.

"You're an angel from heaven, Jim," he said, "for you know more about this part of the game than any of the rest of us. Can I not persuade you to join the staff again in a strictly advisory capacity? Jake Grimpen will do the ordinary test-hopping."

Jim shook his head. "This isn't work if I'm not paid for it," he said, narrowly watching a mechanic who was making an infinitesimal adjustment of the carburetor. "Consequently I'm enjoying myself. Not too much, Pete; go easy on it!"

For the Falcon's men the day ended earlier than for their rivals. A time came when Rock's coolly scientific mind told him that adjusting was over and nervous fussing begun.

"That will do," he decided, and Jim nodded in concurrence.

"She's as fast as she'll ever be, and the Lord help you when you reel up that landing carriage," the ex-tester said candidly.

"I must reel it up, Jim; this race means more to me than you can imagine," Rock

replied, and wearily sat down on the grass. "Darcy, will you superintend the housing of the ship, and the locking of the hangar?"

"Certainly," answered Murthoe, and moved briskly away to boss the job. He snapped on the lock himself after the men had hauled the plane inside, and returned to Rock.

"You keep it," said the tired engineer, as Darcy extended to him the key.

"No, thanks," replied Murthoe emphatically. "I'd much prefer that you had it. Your responsibility, you know."

Rock took the key without further demur. The mechanics wandered away from the hangar, to scatter along the line and watch with deep attention and critical eyes their rivals working on the same details that had kept them busy since dawn. Jake Grimpen followed them, although his attention was much more casual.

When Rock and Murthoe left the field together, Jim declined to join them, preferring to remain behind to exchange persiflage with the brisk young pilots of the other ships.

Inexorably the reddening sun slid down over the edge of the earth, and the other ships followed the Falcon into their sheds. Here and there lights appeared in the hangars, as the work on particularly cranky ships was carried on by white-faced, exhausted men with shaking fingers and sharpened tongues.

Rock and Darcy lingered over their late dinner at the one big hotel near the field until Rockley looked at his wrist watch and arose.

"Time I was in bed," he declared. "I have work to do to-morrow, and eight hours of sleep is the best preparation for it."

His associate assented, and left the table with him. He parted from Rock in the lobby, announcing his intention of getting a bit of air outside.

As soon as he had seen Sutherland into the elevator, however, his stroll became a brisk walk. He left the lighted grounds of the hotel behind him, and set off in the direction of the field, walking with his head down and quickening his pace as he approached and passed the infrequent electric lights.

There were only a few gleams now among the row of hangars. The field itself was as dark and silent as a midnight sea.

Darcy, as he approached, took refuge beside the old wooden fence that encircled the field. He slunk along until he reached a spot some distance from a gate, where a luckless pilot, stretching a glide into the field, had struck the palings with his landing wheels and reduced the boards to splinters. Through the gap Darcy slipped, and hurried along behind the hangars until he approached the shed that housed the Falcon.

Out of the shadows a silent figure stepped. Murthoe started, despite himself; then whispered:

"Grimpen?"

The pilot grunted. "All clear," he mumbled.

"If you had any pluck you would tackle this job alone," Darcy snarled. His voice was tense.

"Rather have you along," Grimpen muttered. "How do I know you're not trying to frame me?"

Together they slunk along beside the corrugated tin wall of the hangar and peered out in front of it. There was no sound and no movement that Darcy could discern. The stars only faintly relieved the blackness all about them.

Murthoe tiptoed to the door, fumbled for the lock, and opened it with a key which was a duplicate of the one he had so ostentatiously turned over to Rock. Hastily he slipped in, with Grimpen close behind.

They shut the door carefully behind them, and then Darcy, after a moment of intense listening, took a flash light from his pocket and threw a circle of radiance upon the cement floor.

By the indirect light of this torch the two men moved without speech to the cockpit of the Falcon. Then Murthoe snapped off the beam, lifted the flash light into the cockpit, and switched it on again.

"Hold it like that," whispered Grimpen, turning it so that the full power of its bulb fell upon the tiny winch that controlled the raising of the landing carriage. He drew from his pocket two tools, a wrench and a cold chisel.

With swift, strong fingers he unfastened the safety wire which was wound about the nut holding the crank. Then, with the wrench he removed the nut and lock washer. Bending close he applied his cold chisel to the threads of the bolt and tapped it, as hard as he dared, with the wrench.



A few blows sufficed to destroy a part of the thread. He put a plain washer in place of the lock washer, and screwed on the nut again. He assured himself that the crank would turn without producing any motion of the winch, and then replaced the safety wire.

Only to one actually attempting to reel up the landing carriage would it be perceptible that the crank had been tampered with. And the landing gear could be raised only when the plane was in the air.

Darcy surveyed Grimpen's work intently, and then smiled.

"That 'll do it, Jake," he muttered.

Grimpen was replacing his tools in his pocket. "I've probably saved that fellow's life," he muttered morosely. "Just the same I'll be damn glad to get away from this country where they treat me like I was a leper or somethin'."

Murthoe laid a soothing hand on his man's shoulder. "In six months, or maybe less, you can go to Europe and live like a millionaire," he said impressively. "Just stand by awhile and you'll never have to work again."

Grimpen growled unintelligibly, but it was plain to Murthoe that his words had been of effect.

Darcy followed the pilot out, and closed and locked the door carefully. He parted with Grimpen behind the hangar, and slipped away by the same route by which he had come. Within an hour he was back in his room, which adjoined that in which Rock was sleeping in preparation for his ordeal.

## VII

WITH dawn came renewed activity at the field, more frantic than ever. Mechanics toiled and engineers tinkered; motors roared a greeting and a challenge to the sun; here and there a pilot put his ship to the test of flight, and shot around the field like a screaming projectile.

And everywhere was tension; nerves strung to the twanging point; jaws set like granite; fingers performing useless movements. And all this would continue for several hours before take-off time.

A few feet in front of the Falcon's hangar stood Rock Sutherland, his usually dreamy countenance animated, and his long, spare figure held straighter than was his habit.

Beside him was his father. Spencer Sutherland seemed to have been affected in

a manner precisely the reverse of that of his son, for he was motionless and reserved, although this scene was new. His observant eyes avoided Rock's, and wandered over the flying field, stopping to dwell upon a speed plane here, or a group of men in consultation there.

Doris Earlston, her arm tucked under that of the elder Sutherland, made the third of the group. The atmosphere of determination and repressed excitement that dominated the field seemed to have subdued her too.

Like Spencer Sutherland, she did not look at the eager face of Rock, but doubtless that was because there were plenty of other things to hold her attention. The men before her, busy on the last minute details of tuning up the most fragile yet most forceful of all man's vehicles, moved as tensely and as grimly as ever men preparing for a desperate attack could move.

The roar of the dozen planes in the air struck the keynote of the scene. Even the spectators, massed behind the ropes that kept them from the deadly menace of whirling propellers and the vehement curses of the mechanics, seemed to vibrate to the thunder and contained power of the machines.

But despite the confusion and action rampant, Doris's attention was not all upon the field. Occasionally her head turned sideways, and she directed a casual glance back at the hangar, beside the big sliding doors of which mechanics fidgeted.

The Falcon was not yet out on the line, for Rock had decided that she could not be tuned better to her task, and might well be hurt by last minute solicitude. Not until the time for warming her up would she come forth.

And this glance of Doris, noting all this, observed also three other figures near the hangar—Jake Grimpen, Jim Penturn, and Darcy Murthoe, who stood together and now conversed in fits and starts. The expression of Darcy, as Doris noted it in those occasional glimpses, was quite unreadable, which probably was why she was attempting to read it.

Jim Penturn, noting a sudden flurry of excitement toward the other end of the line, as a ship he had not seen before was rolled out upon the turf, left Darcy with an abrupt word of explanation and hastened toward it.

Instantly Doris slipped her hand from



under the arm of Rock's absorbed father, and sauntered toward the business manager. He saw her coming, and hastened to meet her.

"He's quite determined to fly," the girl said. "Not even the sight of all these terrific speed planes seems to deter him."

"Oh, no, he's going to fly, certainly," Darcy agreed. "Won't you walk down the line with me and look over the entries? There's a sesquiplane that—"

"No, I've seen them all," Doris interrupted. "We were talking about Rock. He's an old friend of mine, and I'd hate to see him hurt."

"I wouldn't worry too much about him," Darcy replied. "It isn't really as dangerous as it seems to fly that fast, and besides he may not—"

He came to a dead stop, and his eyes searched the face of the girl beside him. She was not looking at him, but at a tuft of grass beside the extended toe of her shoe. "May not what?" she prompted.

"Well, you know," he said slowly, "this is rather different, this race of one hundred and fifty miles, from a mere trial flight over Soundview Field. He may not think it—expedient—to raise the landing wheels, you see, and in that case he is in very little danger indeed."

"I understand," the girl said thoughtfully. "You think that he isn't eager to risk—too much—in winning the race?"

"Can you blame him?" Darcy said, with a shrug. "But, of course, the race will tell. Ah, he's coming back now; I guess that means he wants to warm up the motor. By the way, after you left yesterday he tinkered with the plane in the hangar a bit himself, and then ordered that no one should touch it further."

"Did he?" said Doris. "I didn't know he was much of a mechanic, himself."

"Neither did I," replied Darcy. "I was quite surprised, but of course I didn't comment on it."

Doris went back to Spencer Sutherland as the eager mechanics rolled back the doors and pulled out the Falcon. Her care-free brow was a trifle creased, and she darted more than one surreptitious glance at the man whose side she had just left. Murthoe was walking most solicitously on one side of the plane as it was trundled to the line. Jake Grimpén, on the other hand, kept away from it.

Then Darcy strolled back to the hangar,

and from this distance watched with keen eyes the pilot and the mechanics grouped about the plane. As far as he could see, their care was all for the motor, and for a last test of the vertical and horizontal rudders, and ailerons.

Since the landing wheels could be reeled into the body of the ship only when the plane was in the air, no one ventured to touch the windlass.

"Just the same I'd better plant this key," Darcy muttered, thrusting his hand casually into his trousers pocket and fingering the duplicate. "I should have done it before."

He glanced about. The attention of all was centered upon the plane. He could not have been more alone if he were in the middle of a desert.

Deliberately he drew the key from his pocket and dropped it to the earth in front of the hangar, in plain sight. Then he strolled back to the Falcon again, concealing a furtive smile at the thought of the consternation the finding of that key might cause.

The business of warming up was in full swing, and continued while Rock, with the other pilots, listened to last minute instructions by the race officials.

The big moment came. Pilots climbed into their mounts and taxied far out into the big field, down wind. Mechanics ran beside the machines a little way, then returned to the line with heads still twisted to survey anxiously their particular charges.

The ships, cumbersome and almost unmanageable on the ground, lined up across the field, according to the directions of the chief starter. Then, with a wave of his flag, he sent the first ship off. Charging ahead like an unleashed fury, the machine, a smart little biplane with wings clipped to the limit, and motor bulging in her bonnet, swept a few score feet over the field, leaped into the air, and shot off.

Once it circled the field, buzzing around at a rate that made a mock of distance, and then dipped wing to earth in a sharp turn around the first white pylon. It sped away on the course, diminishing at every instant, till it faded utterly from sight.

Rock Sutherland, waiting his turn, with right hand on the stick and left on throttle, watched the take-offs with more than scientific interest. Never before had airplanes been such real things to him—not objects of engineering skill, but carriers of men.

Biplanes, monoplanes, sesquiplanes—all had once been but ideas in a man's head. Now they were dreams materialized, planes upon which the fortunes of men and the lives of men depended.

Upon the stanchness and speed of his own ship more hung than upon any of the others—for this plane was the champion of aviation. Its gleaming wings bore the future of flying in America. The hundred and fifty miles ahead of him were the most important for aeronautics since Wright took off at Kitty Hawk.

"I've got to win," he muttered. "The plane's all right; it's up to me—me! But it will take four miles a minute to do it! That's my job!"

His gaze strayed to the white pylon around which he must swirl, and an unaccountable uneasiness stirred in him. But it was forgotten the next instant, for the starter's eye was upon him for a moment and then dropped to his watch.

"Go!" he signaled.

Rock opened the throttle. The Falcon moved ponderously ahead. Then her waddling glide quickened, her spinning wheels assailed the inequalities of the green, and she bounced, tail off. An instant later Rockley's hand on the stick lifted the hurtling plane into the air.

He shot upward in a zoom that made the earth seem to fall under him. He straightened out, banked, and followed the blurred rim of the field around, holding the ship at two hundred feet of altitude. The Falcon was gathering speed, but once around that first pylon he—

The pylon leaped into view, and Rock banked the ship hastily. The machine reeled sidewise until one wing pointed directly downward. Nevertheless he swung wide, out beyond the limit of the field, and a feeling of some surprise gripped him. He had intended to cut in closer than that. Leveling off, he headed the ship down the ten-mile leg of the triangular course.

"I wasted time on that," he muttered. "I've got to begin to move." His left hand went toward the crank, and he gripped the handle tightly. He turned—and beneath his helmet a puzzled frown creased his forehead. The crank turned very easily.

"What—" he murmured, and straightened up for a glance ahead. He discovered that in that short interval he had swung far to the right of the course. He got the ship back on the course with a slight move-

ment of his feet on the rudder bar, and then looked again at the windlass.

Taking hold of the crank, he turned, his eyes upon the shaft that should rotate. It remained motionless. The wheels below the fuselage did not move. Disregarding the course of the plane for a moment, he worked frantically at the crank. The nut that held it was loose in his hand, and not all his efforts would tighten it.

Like a leaden weight on his chest came the knowledge that the windlass was unworkable; he would fly this race with those wheels and struts sucking away the speed that the flickering propeller imparted to the plane.

He straightened up again, until he felt the drum of the wind on the top of his helmet, and stared straight ahead. Already the ten miles of that first leg were almost over; the turning pylon, on a field near the south shore of the island, was ahead. He cut his altitude in a gradual glide that increased his speed somewhat—and then looked sharply to his left.

Another monoplane, at about the same altitude, was cleaving the air, and even as he looked, he saw it was driving rapidly ahead of him. Its pilot spared him a flick of his head, then turned to stare at the pylon that was growing in size, like a magic flower.

Rock Sutherland felt a stab of pain at his heart. The man who had left a full minute behind him, had passed! The Falcon has been passed in free flight—passed on the first lap! Hope died away, and with it the scientific certitude in which was rooted his complacency.

"I'll finish, anyhow," he muttered, and bent grimly to the task of cutting in as close to that pylon as was possible. It was only a fraction of a second that could be saved, but Rock intended to save it.

He failed miserably. Although he headed his monoplane, seemingly, right at the pylon, he found himself slipping out, far beyond it, as he banked. And the speed, the pressure, the buffeting of the wind bewildered and dazed him. He swung back on the course again, and raced down the green island, with the green waters of Great South Bay sleeping placidly on his right.

And then ensued the most miserable three-quarters of an hour that Rock Sutherland had ever endured. Planes, their roar utterly extinguished by the sound of his own laboring motor, drifted by him on

every leg of the course; only once did he pass a machine, and then he knew it to be suffering from engine trouble.

And every pylon was a new agony—for try as he would, he could not bank around them as the other pilots did. And the awful jumble of blurring emotions as he swept around was a bitter ordeal.

Not once did the thought of landing occur to him, not even when he roared past the starting field and realized that down there Doris, his father, and the men who had sweated and toiled on that plane for days were all watching him disgrace them.

"I'll finish," he repeated, as each fast ship hummed by, and each pylon approached. Once, in his fever of self-reproach he disregarded direction and drifted wide of the course, losing more time. Then, as the minutes dragged by, he noticed that the planes passing him were less frequent, and hope rose—for just an instant. Were they unable to stand the pace?

The next instant he realized what was occurring. The fastest planes had finished the race. As he swept by the home field he saw confirmation of this in the little white-winged ships standing on the line below, with crowds about them—one with a very great crowd—the winner. Only the lame ducks—the tail-enders—were still in the air.

"I'll finish!" he muttered again, and once more he straightened his tall body in the little cockpit, and let the slip-stream of air from the propeller thunder upon his helmet and goggles. The plane, like a wounded duck, outdistanced by the flock, flew on alone in the sky.

### VIII

FINISH he did, landing near the row of hangars and taxiing up to his own shed with his face set under his leather cowl. A stricken group of mechanics leaned against the hangar, but they roused themselves and ran forward as his slow-moving plane drew close to the line.

Rock got out silently, and faced Doris, his father, and Darcy, as they approached. Doris slipped ahead of the others as he slid to the ground, and laid her hand for just an instant on the sleeve of his flying jacket.

"Never mind, Rock," she murmured soothingly. "You did your best against them, and you're an engineer, remember, not a pilot."

He did not answer; he was too dazed, too utterly desolate, for that; but the words, or rather the tone of the girl's voice, was like balm upon a wound. It enabled him to control his ragged nerves, his exhausted body, his disturbed mind, for the moment, at least.

He swung about and addressed the mechanics.

"Roll it in," he commanded, waving his hand toward the hangar. "But all of you keep away from the cockpit." Then he lifted his helmet from his goggles and faced Spencer Sutherland.

"Sorry to bring you down here just to show you what a braggart and failure your son is, father," he said bitterly. "But I still have a chance to get that twenty-five thousand, haven't I?"

Spencer Sutherland laid his hand on his shoulder. "Too bad, son. But it wouldn't have done you a bit of good to win the race. I half intended to tell you before you started, but I didn't. This shooting around in the air on one ear"—he waved a hand toward the pylon that marked the turn—"isn't transportation—it's monkey shines.

"And I said earn that twenty-five thousand in transportation. You didn't carry anything in that plane but yourself. How much money would a railroad make whose locomotives couldn't carry anything but the engineers?"

Rock was silent as his mind took in his father's statement.

"I understand," he said at last. "I'll remember that in the future. But just now I have a—a thing to do if you will excuse me."

He followed the mechanics who were trundling the monoplane into the hangar. Darcy drew alongside him as he entered the shed.

"What was it, Rock?" he asked, as the engineer gestured to the mechanics to leave the hangar. "We could see that the landing carriage wasn't up, but—"

"That's what I'm going to find out," Rockley replied, and climbed into the cockpit. He removed the nut holding on the crank, scrutinized it, and then turned his attention to the bolt. The damaged threads were plainly visible.

"That windlass was in perfect condition when I landed last night after the final test flight, Darcy," he said. "I tried it in the air. Some one deliberately wrecked it, after the machine was locked up."

Murthoe simulated a start of surprise, and his eyes met Rock's with perfect frankness. "You don't mean it!" he exclaimed, and bent to stare at the bolt Rockley held. "It does look that way," he conceded. "But who could have done it?"

Rock shook his head wearily. "It is hard to have to suspect any one." His voice was sober, rather than irate. "I never believed these stories of machines fixed in races, but—oh, damn it, Darcy, what a rotten trick this is!"

He reached in his pocket and brought forth the key. "Is this the only one that fits that lock?"

"As far as I know, it is. I'm glad now—though of course it is selfish of me—that I gave it to you last night."

"I'm tired," said Rock. His white, lined face plainly revealed the truth of his words. He felt his self-control slipping. A blind, flaming wrath was rising in him. He forced himself to go on: "I won't be able to make anything of this now. I'd better rest."

"A good plan," Darcy agreed hastily. "Later, if you really believe the thing was done purposely, I'd look these mechanics over pretty carefully, or—" He stopped abruptly, mouth agape, as if stricken into immobility by a sudden thought.

Rock looked up.

"What?" he asked quickly. "Go on—tell me, if you have anything to tell. What's on your mind?"

Darcy recovered. "No," he murmured as if to himself. "No, that's hardly possible. He wouldn't do a thing like that even for revenge." He shook his head, as if banishing a thought, and then spoke aloud to Rockley. "Nothing," he answered. "Just a fool idea I can't tell you about."

"You mean Jim Penturn," Rock said slowly. "But surely Jim— Oh, I hope not!"

"There isn't a scrap of evidence against him," Murthoe asserted positively. "Of course he was around here all day yesterday and he hasn't come near us since the finish, but—" He, too, was silent.

"If I thought—" All the agony, the humiliation, the mental torture of that flight recurred to him, with greater poignancy than ever. He climbed out of the cockpit and stood staring at the floor. He must get away from this place of blighted hope, of rank treachery at once.

Into the silent hangar at that moment

walked Jim Penturn, his face grave, even sympathetic.

"Tough luck," he said, as he saw the downcast figure of Rockley. "I was rooting for you, Rock, even if I did think that plane was a graveyard special. But what happened to the retractable landing gear?"

Rock raised his head and stared with mounting anger at the test pilot. His hands quivered. Jim Penturn's countenance was sympathetic, and quite frank, but at his former employer's strange gaze he betrayed some slight discomfort. Rock had never looked at him like that before.

Jim opened his mouth for further comment on the race, then changed his mind and closed it again. He looked down uneasily at his hands, and suddenly extended one of them toward Rockley, who had not removed his eyes from him.

"By the way," he said, with an effort at ease, "here's a key that I picked up just outside."

Rock's gaze leaped from Jim's reddening face to the key that lay in his open hand. To his exhausted, shaken mind this was proof that Jim Penturn was guilty.

"Darcy," he commanded, his voice suddenly hoarse and uneven, "close that door!"

Murthoe, marveling at this piece of good fortune that had made Penturn himself find the key, crossed the hangar and rolled the door shut.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jim Penturn.

"I wouldn't believe it at first, but this convinces me," Rock burst out, stretching a hand toward the key. He was shaking with rage and shredded nerves, and the words poured forth from his mouth as if without his volition. "You wrecked that windlass, and now you come to taunt me! Penturn, you've got to fight!"

With feverish haste Rock Sutherland ripped the cumbersome leather flying coat from him, and flung it to the floor. Penturn stood petrified, staring at Rockley as first Rock had stared at him.

"Fight!" repeated the tall engineer, and rushed at the test pilot, both arms swinging widely. At the door Darcy Murthoe smiled his secret smile, and drew closer.

Jim Penturn recovered from his astonishment in time to parry most of the blows that Rockley rained upon him, and then, stepping aside, he devoted himself to fighting. Although shorter than Rock, he was



slightly heavier, and moreover, he had fought before. Further, he was angry, but not too angry.

At the end of an infuriated, unscientific attack delivered by Rock he came in crouching, head bent, arms moving like pistons, inside the widely swinging arms of the engineer.

His fists drummed upon Rockley's chest, and then one of them, moving a scant eight inches, shot up under Rock's unprotected chin and thudded upon it. Rockley's head jerked backward as if it would snap off, and then he dropped, arms sprawling, totally unconscious, to the floor.

Jim Penturn stood for a moment above the fallen man, looking down at him in mute astonishment.

"Get some water!" he commanded at last, turning to Darcy. "And get that damn smirk off your face, too! Can't you see the poor fellow's down and out?"

Murthoe picked up a bottle of distilled water and brought it over to Penturn, who was kneeling beside the outstretched figure of Rock.

"Better get out now, before he comes to; for he'll only be upset if he sees you," Darcy suggested. "I'll take care of him."

Jim Penturn stood up, and again looked down with a shamed face at the prostrate form of Rock. "I shouldn't have done it," he murmured regretfully. "The poor old fellow was half off his chump about losing the race."

"Better get out," Darcy repeated, and Jim turned toward the door.

"I'll stand off his father and Doris if they try to come in," he said, and left the hangar.

When Rockley came to he found Darcy holding him up with his arm about him, and sprinkling water over his head. Bewilderment gave way speedily to gravity on his face, as he thought back over the fight.

"He beat me, didn't he, Darcy?" he muttered. "Did it without any trouble at all, too!"

"Never mind that, Rock," Darcy said, turning away and risking a grin as he fumbled with the water bottle. His voice was soothing, and entirely sympathetic. "You were all tired out, and he was fresh, and besides, he's something of a fighter."

"Beaten again!" Rockley said, half to himself. "Twice in one day! And Jim was always a good friend of mine, too!"

"It doesn't look so, from what he did to your plane," young Murthoe interposed sharply.

Rock was silent. With an effort he freed himself from Darcy's supporting arm and climbed to his feet, laying a shaky hand on the fuselage of the Falcon.

"I'm all right now," he said. "You go out and try to get father and Doris to leave the field without seeing me all bashed up like this."

Murthoe demurred, but finally went on the mission. Left alone, Rock leaned heavily against his racing plane, and stared sadly at the damaged windlass.

"What a day," he muttered. "Lost a race, lost a fight, and proved myself a conceited, opinionated joke. But I'm going to get that twenty-five thousand, no matter what happens."

## IX

BUT Rock had still to undergo travail that day.

When he had gone into his hangar to inspect the Falcon, Doris had remained talking to his troubled father for some time. She had said good-by shortly after Jim Penturn came out of the shed. Being an independent young lady, she had brought no escort with her to the race, and now she was compelled to struggle alone through the dispersing crowds toward her parked roadster.

As she reached it Darcy Murthoe overtook her. She stayed her hand on the gear lever, and invited him into the car. Darcy accepted eagerly, his eyes gleaming with suppressed excitement.

"What is it?" Doris asked, noting his emotion.

"Rock says his landing gear was jammed somehow—on purpose," he answered. "And when Jim Penturn came in he accused him of doing it—and Jim knocked him out!" He poured out the story, and added at the end:

"You see, I wasn't far wrong in my prophecy."

"About Rock's not using the windlass?" Doris inquired. "Oh, Darcy, do you suppose he fixed it himself so it wouldn't work?"

But Darcy balked at that. He shrugged his shoulders. "I can't say that," he demurred. "All I know is that he was the last man to tinker with that plane yesterday. And you can't blame a man for try-



ing to save his life—and his reputation—if he lost his nerve at the last moment.”

“But why, then, did he accuse Jim Pen-  
turn?” Doris demanded.

“The blame had to be placed on somebody, but Jim didn’t take it as meekly as he might.”

“What a horrible thing to do!” the girl burst forth. “Really, Rock’s becoming quite impossible—cowardly, scheming, dishonest.”

Her eyes sought his questioningly.

Murthoe moved somewhat uneasily as she turned to him to share her outspoken indignation. “Well, I wouldn’t put it that strong,” he murmured, but the protest in his tone was feeble.

“I would, and I’m half inclined to cut him *dead*,” Doris declared most emphatically. “And I don’t see why you don’t resign immediately.”

“I couldn’t do that; I simply couldn’t,” Darcy declared hastily. “Why, he’d think I was deserting to take my father’s part. And, besides”—he looked about as if seeking an inspiration—“I couldn’t”—he repeated. “I couldn’t, because he’s an old friend of mine, that’s why.”

“It is noble of you to take that attitude,” the girl exclaimed with frank admiration in her glance.

Darcy relaxed. “Well, that’s the way I feel about it,” he said modestly. “I’ll have to go back now; he needs me.”

Doris let him go, and her eyes glowed into his as he backed away from the roadster.

“Hypocrite!” she muttered, and her pretty lips curled as she put the car into gear. “I half believe he damaged that windlass thing himself. I do! What a simpleton he is to try to make me believe Rock did it!”

She drove homeward swiftly, her smooth young brow wearing unaccustomed lines, and many a male driver murmured remarks anent the wisdom of Kipling in placing the female of the species in the fore as regards deadliness.

However, she reached the Earlston estate in safety. A few hundred feet within the private grounds she deserted the car in the roadway. With swift feet she fled down to a little brook, flanked on each side by shady trees which drew their moisture from it, and sank down on a little plot of grass.

With impatient hands she tossed aside her little gray hat, and flung herself face

downward on the green. After a moment or two she raised her head, chin on elbows, and surveyed the chuckling brook with marked disfavor.

“I don’t know what to do,” she confided to the rippling water. “I’m sure this Darcy Murthoe is a treacherous cur, and yet—it was *good* for Rock to lose that race.

“He isn’t conceited—I suppose—and yet—he needs a few hard knocks. He’s so scientifically certain. Ugh! Oh, if I could only make a man of him instead of a spectactled old granny!”

She meditated, but her decision was long in coming.

“It’s good for him,” she said at last. “I’ll let things stand as they are—he must work out his own salvation. But did Darcy Murthoe try—is he—well, I’ll be right at his side, watching him, and if he tries to hurt Rock—”

She left the threat unspoken, as if it was more terrible that way. But if she could have seen the future, and what would come of that decision not to tell Rock of her suspicions, she might have agreed with the drivers she had brushed by so casually, as to the recklessness of the female.

This brief interlude by the brook perhaps explains why, when Rock Sutherland, hiding his hurt feelings behind his owlish spectacles, whirled up to Doris’s house late that afternoon he got the reception he did.

Those swift, soothing words that the girl had spoken, as, beaten and dismayed, he stepped out of the Falcon, had remained in his mind. Although he did not realize it, they were the motive power that brought him to her house that afternoon.

Still tired, bruised from his two defeats, and apprehensive concerning his own practicality, he came to her for more of that balm.

But just then Doris wasn’t dispensing any sympathy. She was playing tennis with a lithe young man from a neighboring estate. All Rock received in the way of greeting was a careless nod and a request to chase a ball that had been knocked beyond the backstop.

He betook his weary body and aching brain after the ball, and came back to slump sadly down upon a bench and glare at the young fellow who continued to play tennis. But not for long.

Doris was very wild that afternoon, and

ball after ball went whirring over the back-stop, and time after time Rock Sutherland crept among the bushes searching for them.

When, at last, her playmate departed, proudly crowing over his unexpected and unusual victory, the girl came and dropped down beside Rockley on the green bench.

"Well, I hope you've decided to be sensible, now, Rock," she said.

This wasn't at all in the tone that Rock desired. Here was no tenderness, no soothing.

"I—I had a terrible time during that race, Doris," he said, his voice rather feeble.

"You certainly made a terrible exhibition of yourself," the girl commented severely. "That is," she added, quite unconscious of his startled glance, "you would have if it hadn't been funny. Honestly, sometimes when you banked around that pylon and went slipping away beyond it I thought my sides would simply burst."

"What!" exclaimed Rock. "You were laughing at me, Doris?" He was bewildered. Where was the girl who had been so gentle to him after the race?

He leaned helplessly back against the bench. This was the worst blow he had received that day. For, on those infrequent occasions, when something had gone wrong on paper, Doris had always been his source of refuge and comfort. And now—she confessed that she had laughed at him.

"What else could I do?" asked Doris, quite oblivious to the effect her heartlessness had had upon him. "It wasn't my fault you were so funny, was it? Buzzing around the track miles behind the others, and apparently having a little race all by yourself?"

Rock stood up, his expression severe. It did not occur to him to explain about the windlass—that would be in the nature of an excuse.

"I really didn't think that you, Doris—would—" he began, but she interrupted ruthlessly.

"Oh, do sit down and stop being dramatic, Rock. Don't you think now that you'd better close up Soundview field and ask your father to let you have that six months' income for yourself? You must realize how hopeless it is for you to try to earn twenty-five thousand dollars."

Rockley disregarded the girl's command to sit down. Instead, he stood there, looking down at her with an expression that no psychologist could analyze.

Slowly his hand crept up, and he removed his spectacles. His jaws clamped together, and set tightly, straightening the line of his mouth. He drew back his shoulders. Eventually he spoke.

"As I said once before, I will never give up this chance to do something big for aviation, Doris. You're urging me to surrender—to quit. I shall not."

Doris giggled, and the sound of her mirth brought a flush to Rock's face, as he realized the pose into which he had so unconsciously fallen.

He put on his glasses again, and his shoulders came forward a bit, leaving him slightly stooped. His mouth relaxed, but his jaws somehow escaped the havoc that the giggle had wrought. They remained fixed.

"Well, go on then—earn the twenty-five thousand," said Doris. "It certainly will be funny to watch."

"I will," said Rock. "At least I'll try—damn hard."

He turned and walked toward his car. Doris did not move from the bench, but she watched him breathlessly as he climbed in and said a curt word to Mike, who was driving.

The car rolled down the driveway. And as it swept around a curve, Doris whipped out an inadequate little handkerchief and crumpled into a desolate heap on the green bench.

"Oh, poor Rock!" she sobbed. "But at least he said 'damn.' Thank Heaven for that!"

Rockley was feeling very poor indeed, as he sat hunched over in one corner of the rear seat and the car bore him down the gravel road toward the Earlston gate.

Everything had gone wrong that day, and to a young man for whom everything previously had gone right, with scientific precision, this is not only disconcerting, it is bewildering. His beloved Falcon had become a joke, and he with it; doubtless the newspapers would have many a witty remark to make about his performance.

And Jim Penturn had betrayed him, and later had demonstrated most effectively what a poor sort of creature he was in a physical sense.

Rock had never paid much attention to his body, but he had assumed that he was quite as strong and quick moving as any other young man. Jim Penturn had shown him how wrong he was.

And now—the culminating blow—Doris, whom he had considered as unchanging and firm a supporter as if she had been a part of him, had suddenly developed a most aggravating giggle which she used upon him without mercy. He was an object of ridicule to every one he knew—even Doris.

But fate had just one more blow for him that day. As the car hurtled along it swerved sharply to the side of the road.

Rock glanced up. The car had turned to avoid a taxicab that was entering the grounds, and in the taxicab was Jim Penturn. For just an instant their eyes met, and then the two machines passed.

In giving Rockley that sight of his enemy going to visit his girl, fate had gone too far. Doubtless it was intended to crush out utterly whatever spirit was left in him. But Rock straightened up, and abandoned his orgy of self-pity.

"Hell!" Rock growled in a tone that would have gladdened Doris's heart. "I've got to find time to take boxing lessons."

Peculiar is the scientific mind. That decision of his that he must learn how to chastise Jim Penturn set Rock upon a review of the day's proceedings, straight on through his interview with Doris to the fight in the hangar, and back to the race.

From that day to the previous one it then leaped, and by the time he reached Soundview it was still working backward toward the time when Jim Penturn had resigned.

And Rock saw with increasing clearness that in none of Jim Penturn's actions was there any basis for a belief that he had deliberately attempted to damage the Falcon.

Jim was an excellent pilot, lazy, of course, and somewhat suspicious of Rockley's aeronautical engineering, but he was certainly not in the least malicious or revengeful. Rock's outburst and attack on him in the hangar had been wholly without reason, save for Darcy's reluctant word or so concerning Jim. And Darcy had been wrong.

"I jumped at a conclusion when I was overwrought, and I got very well punished for it," Rock told himself. "I must straighten that out immediately."

But Rockley was not the only one who received punishment for that fight in the hangar. Although Jim Penturn had been an easy victor, he was wishing, at the very

time of Rock's meditation, that he had been on the losing end.

Jim had made a tactical error in calling upon Doris while that young lady's eyes were still red. This unconscious but frightful misdeed was quite enough to insure him a very bad time of it, but in addition to that, Doris was already vastly displeased with him.

He had come to confess his misdeed; to tell her that he hadn't meant to fight Rock, and to knock him out, but had been compelled to do so as a matter of self defense. And he wanted to make his peace with Rock through her. But he discovered that Doris already knew all about the fight, and he was instantly and bewilderedly on the defensive again.

Doris welcomed him as an outlet for her emotions other than tears, and she flew at him with the savagery of a starving lynx kitty. How dared he attack a helpless, inoffensive, gentle young man like Rockley Sutherland? What did he mean—

"You're right, of course," he managed to put in. "But—"

That was as far as he got, but at last, by means of emphatic signs of deep humility and repentance, he was, figuratively, permitted to get up and dust off his clothes.

"You've got to go over and apologize to him," Doris announced. "Don't you see how badly he needs somebody to help him just now—even you might be of some use, and here you go and antagonize him and brutally beat him! Why—"

"I'll do anything you say, Doris," he ventured to interpose.

"You'd better," she declared. "I've got to have a little help if I'm going to think up a way to earn twenty-five thousand dollars—or rather make Rock earn it, which is harder."

"You're going—"

"Of course I'm going to," she said tartly. "You don't think Rock is, do you? Don't sit down on that bench that way; you aren't stunned, you're just lazy!"

"All right! All right!" exclaimed Jim placatingly, and arose almost with alacrity. "You give the orders; I'll obey them."

"Well, then, get your brain busy on the matter of just how to earn twenty-five thousand dollars in aerial transportation," Doris commanded unrelentingly. "And now go away before I get mad at you again. When I think of how you dared to strike a poor, tired—"

Jim escaped. He went back to his boarding house at Mineola, and lay down on his bed in a position which seemed to him most conducive to deep thought. Naturally he fell asleep. He was awakened by a rapping on the door, shot a glance at the window which revealed that late twilight was upon him, and somewhat apprehensively answered the knock.

"A Mr. Sutherland wants to see you," his landlady's daughter announced.

"Send him up," Jim said, and involuntarily he glanced at his bruised knuckles. He got up, and awaited his visitor alertly, feet apart, and arms swinging free, but it was in the position of a wrestler rather than a boxer.

Rockley Sutherland entered the room. Jim blinked. Rock had dressed himself with some care for this interview, in a blue serge suit purchased *en masse* with several others months before, but never worn.

It was apparent, not only from his apparel, but from his expression, that he considered the occasion a formal one. His face was pale and more lined about the eyes than usual. He returned Jim's rather cautious greeting and remained standing.

"I've come as a matter of justice," he said stiffly. "After careful thought I have come to the conclusion that you had no hand in the damage done to the Falcon. My outbreak and attack upon you was wholly unwarranted, and—and dastardly. I have told Darcy so. And I ask your pardon for it."

"Well!" said Jim Penturn with vast relief. "Rock, you just beat me to it; I was coming over to apologize to you." He motioned the other man to a chair, and promptly sat back on the bed.

"Jim—I—I must have been off my head to accuse you of anything like that," Rock Sutherland muttered shamefacedly, as he dropped into the seat and stared at the floor. "But when you walked in and handed me that key—after all that had happened—"

"Oh, that's all right," Jim interposed hastily. "I'm not crooked, I'm lazy; but there's no telling what I might be if I wasn't lazy. But just precisely what happened to the ship?"

Rock told him, and Jim listened with an amazement that made him forget his comfort and lean forward.

"I wouldn't have believed that any of the boys were that low down," he muttered.

"But—there's a lot of money up on this race, and—well, out of twenty competitors, and Lord knows how many interested parties, there might well be one wrong 'un. But I'd keep quiet about it if I were you. No good squealing now."

"I shan't—squeal," replied Rock. He got to his feet and walked restlessly about the small room. "Jim, what's the matter with me, anyhow? I'm not like the other fellows in the flying game—I'm a queer fish, a conceited ass, I know it. And yet—"

Jim settled back again comfortably.

"I can tell you all about yourself," he announced. "I used to watch you work when I wasn't doing anything in particular myself. You aren't human; you're scientific. You like work."

"That's enough to queer anybody; but in addition to that, you like to work on paper, which is worse, for you don't apparently get any results—usually—except a headache and four hours' sleep a night, instead of eight. Personally I prefer ten."

"Um," said Rock doubtfully.

"What you need is open air—five or ten thousand feet up—hard work—and trouble. You've got to learn that things don't work out in real life as they do on paper, especially in the flying game."

"I intend to reform now," Rock announced firmly. "That is, as far as work is concerned. I shall discard paper and go in for facts. You see, I've got to make some real money."

He poured out the whole story of his opportunity, which Jim had already heard from Doris.

"Air lines! That's what we need!" Jim agreed. "And say, if you win out and get all that money there ought to be a reasonably soft ground job for me somewhere. I'll help you. I'm back on your pay roll right now!"

"Fine!" exclaimed Rock. He hesitated, and then somewhat self-consciously shook hands with the test pilot. "I've been disgraced in the air, and beaten on the ground, and laughed at by—um—but, by Icarus, I'm not through yet!"

"That's the spirit!" applauded Jim Penturn, indulging in a luxurious stretch. "Up and at 'em! But, say, twenty-five thousand is an unholy lot of money."

## X

NEXT morning, in the office once sacred to the theory of flying, Rock Sutherland



laid a hand on a head which gave every indication that it was soon to ache, and considered gloomily, but with determination, the problem of becoming practical.

The abrupt change of a man's nature is a difficult thing to accomplish, in any case, and when it is complicated by the necessity for obtaining twenty-five thousand dollars as a proof of the thoroughness of the change it becomes hard to the point of impossibility.

How did people become practical, and how did practical people amass twenty-five thousand dollars in aeronautical transportation? Rock moaned uneasily. Then he began mumbling to himself:

"Speed is my capital. I must sell speed to people—at a good big price. All right. I've got the speed in my planes here—where do I get the people?"

He considered this gravely, and then pronounced, with the air of one to whom an inspiration has come:

"Advertising! That's it. Go where you want at two miles a minute for—for say a dollar a mile. Or if that's too fast for you, go where you want at a mile a minute for—well, for fifty cents a mile.

"I'll put that in the papers and magazines and see what happens. Later on I must try a regular air line, but I can start on this."

He jumped up, with some returning alacrity, and crossed the room to open a door.

"Darcy!" he called briskly. "How much cash have we on hand?"

Murthoe, who had been sitting at his desk with a cigarette between his fingers, looked up, startled. This was the first time since he had acquired this sinecure that his employer had asked him anything about money.

"Why—we have about a thousand dollars, but—"

"I'm going to spend it all on advertising," Rock announced in a most business-like manner. "There must be plenty of people in New York who want to get somewhere in a terrific hurry. Well, we'll oblige 'em, but first we've got to let 'em know about it."

Darcy was too stunned by this outburst of practicality to say anything. His eyes narrowed slightly as he stared at his young employer.

Before Rockley could amplify his announcement the attention of both men was drawn to a car which came to a quick stop

just in front of the office window. Doris Earlston had arrived. She glanced through the window with an entire lack of delicacy, and an instant later followed her glance—through the door.

"Hello!" she said, including both men in her cheery smile. Rock was too surprised at once to return her greeting; her attitude this morning could be no further removed from that of the previous afternoon. But she seemed to have forgotten that unpleasant interview beside the tennis court entirely. "What are you doing this morning?"

"Rock's thinking of advertising," said Darcy.

Doris slipped into an office chair, quite uninvited, and with brisk questions prodded the rather stiff and unfriendly Rockley into an exposition of his ideas. Then she puckered her forehead thoughtfully.

"Well, I'm running into New York today in the car—right away, in fact. If you want, Darcy, I'll take you in and you can make inquiries about what you can do with a thousand dollars in the advertising field."

Murthoe assented eagerly; Rockley agreed with less enthusiasm.

As unexpectedly as she had come, Doris departed, carrying off a very contented Darcy.

They had not gone more than a mile or so before Darcy, who had been more thoughtful in her company than she was accustomed to have him, asked her to stop that he might telephone. It was a very important business matter, he said.

Doris waited impatiently and speculated with feminine curiosity what the business was all about. If she had known that the number Murthoe called was his father's private telephone at the Seven Rivers Building, she would have been more impatient still.

But Darcy was not long in communicating his news to Jefferson Murthoe, and when he came out he was in a much more amiable mood, having passed on his responsibility. When he took his seat beside her again he was much more animated.

The conversation on the way to the city embraced many topics, including, but not featuring, advertising. It was most pleasant for Darcy, for Doris was decidedly friendly, although inclined to find Rock's decision to advertise a source of amusement. That levity, however, did not annoy Darcy, and after a time he even ventured

to join in it. Altogether, it was a most enjoyable ride.

"Just drop me anywhere around the East Side subway," he suggested, as at last they bowled over the Queensboro Bridge. Doris nodded, and as the car reached Lexington Avenue on Sixtieth Street, she drew up to the curb.

"Sorry I can't take you back, but I'm not sure just when I'll be going out, and I don't want to keep you waiting," she said, and drove away.

But as she turned the corner she shot a glance backward, and discovered that Darcy was entering a drug store. Another telephone call? On impulse, she applied the brakes swiftly, and jumped out of the car. She hurried back to the store not a minute after Murthoe had disappeared within.

She entered unostentatiously, and confirmed her suspicion. Darcy was in a telephone booth, engrossed in getting a number. As the booths were in a dark corner of the store, she had no difficulty in slipping unobserved into one alongside it.

Now, although it is hard to hear a conversation being carried on in a telephone booth when standing outside it; it is even harder not to hear a conversation when you are in an adjoining booth. Doris, listening frankly, with both ears, heard all that Darcy said.

"Hello? Father? I'm in town. Yes, it's all right to talk this end. Do you think advertising will get our friend any passengers? Stop it? But how? I don't think we're taking a chance in letting him blow the thousand all in. Who did you talk it over with? Oh, your fellow Ward! What did he suggest? Yes, I think Rock would be willing to risk the thousand if he saw a chance of making another thousand, but—"

His father cut in there, and a long pause followed, while Doris waited and wished she could hear both ends of the conversation between the scrupulous Murthoes.

"Ward is clever," Darcy said. There was admiration in his voice. "Yes, I think he'd bite at that right off. No, there's no more money due for some time that he could use for that. But are you sure there's no landing place for ten miles, and no sizable lake, either? In the heart of the Adirondacks. All right. Fine—I'll just stall around to-day, then, and when our mysterious passenger shows up to-morrow, I'll

help the game along. Right! It will be fun! Good-by!"

Doris put her back to the glass door of the booth and waited apprehensively within it for possible discovery. But young Murthoe walked quickly out of the store. She ventured a glance and discovered with relief that he was heading toward the subway, and would not discover her parked car.

As soon as the coast was clear she left the store and drove hurriedly toward Central Park. Once within its curving drive-ways she drew to the side, and thought over the conversation that she had overheard.

All she could make of it was that Darcy, as she had already suspected, was treacherously working hand-in-glove with his father to defeat Rock, and that a "friend" of the elder Murthoe had concocted some plan whereby Rockley was to be cheated out of the thousand dollars he intended to use in advertising.

She found comfort in the fact that Jefferson Murthoe feared Rock's use of that money in publicity sufficiently to exert himself to prevent it. But what was the plan? "No landing field for ten miles, and no sizable lake, either?" "In the heart of the Adirondacks." "Mysterious passenger shows up to-morrow."

Those were all the clues she had, and after mulling them over until nursemaids began to stare and comment on the pretty girl with the queer frown in her forehead in the motionless roadster, she drove on.

"Little Doris will be on hand to-morrow to help the game along—in the opposite direction," she murmured. "That's all I can do, but I wish—"

And she continued to wish that she knew more about it all the way back to her home.

The next morning the Soundview field gained a new employee. Doris, arriving early, announced it herself.

"I'm tired of tennis and golf—my kind—and swimming, flying my slowpoke seaplane, and so forth, all day, with a lot of people that never do anything worth while," she told Rock, perching on the edge of his sacred table. "It's much nicer to have a job so you can play hookey from it to go tennising or swimming," she explained airily. "Now I dare you to try and throw me out."

"I wouldn't do that, of course," Rock

said gravely, "but I don't see what you can do. I've just had the unpleasant duty of giving my technical men indefinite leaves of absence, without pay, other than the usual two weeks, and—"

"Poor Rock!" the girl exclaimed, and ran an impertinent hand through his harassed hair. "That must have been a wrench. But I don't want any pay, and I'll arrange my own hours. I intend to be a ray of sunshine—that sort of thing, you know."

Rock didn't know, but he didn't object, either. He was inclined to suffer the presence of the girl so that he might study her most peculiar temperament covertly. It would be a relief from practicality.

Darcy had reported on the amount of advertising that might be had for one thousand dollars, and he and Rock were planning how thin, and just where to spread it, when Jim Penturn poked his head in.

"Cash customer outside," he reported. "Blew up in a car, and wants to hire a plane."

Rock started. So there were people who desired aerial transportation!

"Send him in at once, Jim," he said, with a smile.

There entered a hurried gentleman, old and plump enough to carry a brown mustache with dignity, and yet obviously, by his smooth skin, not beyond his late thirties. His eyes were jet black, deeply set, and singularly piercing.

He was well dressed in a dark suit, with a waistcoat with white piping, and a cravat that indicated slightly more expense than taste.

As he entered, Doris looking almost bored, with a pile of papers in her hands, came in through the door of Darcy's office, and went over to Rock's own file. There she busied herself, ignoring Rockley's glance of amazement.

Without an instant's pause the gentleman burst into quick, stilted speech. "I am told that an airplane may be hired here for a long journey," he said. "I must go on if I have been misinformed." His eyes, quick, sunken, rested upon Rock.

"We are in the aerial transportation business," said Rockley. "Where do you wish to go?"

"Well, thank Heaven!" exclaimed the stranger fervently. He withdrew from the breast of his conservative coat a wallet of black leather, and placed it on the table.

"Gentlemen," he said impressively. "My name is Ward. I have in this the sum of one thousand dollars. I—I am unacquainted with aeronautics, but I am prepared to risk my life in an airplane and pay that amount if you can place me at Tuscard Camp in the Adirondacks within the next four hours." He glanced at both Rock and Darcy, and then hurried on:

"It is a matter of—I was going to say life and death, but that is perhaps a bit too much—I shall say, rather, it is a matter of supreme importance to me, in a financial way, that I reach the camp and conclude a certain business transaction with its owner within a time limit that expires at three o'clock."

With fingers that trembled quite perceptibly, he withdrew from his pocket a gold watch.

"It is now twenty minutes of eleven. Tuscard Camp is about two hundred and fifty miles from here. You see how utterly dependent upon a fast airplane I am."

Rock glanced at the weather report which was daily telephoned to the field.

"We can get you there, Mr. Ward," he announced confidently.

"Good! Gas your ship, then!" the stranger said with an air of relief.

Rock jumped to his feet and strode over to the door. Jim Penturn was seated on the running board of Doris's car, his eyes fixed speculatively on the office.

"Jim, please get maps of the Adirondack region, and then go down and warm up the amphibian, will you? Gas her for five hours at top speed."

"Right!" said Jim without enthusiasm. He walked toward the hangar on the water front at slightly better than his usual pace.

Rockley returned to the office, and found the gentleman from nowhere recklessly counting out one-hundred-dollar bills, with Doris watching the process, fascinated.

"There you are, sir; I pay in advance," he said, pushing the yellow bills across the table toward Rock. He paused, as apparently a sudden thought struck him.

"But what assurance have I that you will accomplish this flight?" he asked. "If I do not reach the camp by three, not only do I lose a—a great sum, but I also throw away a thousand dollars!"

Rock hesitated. "The sum you offer is perhaps double what I would charge for a flight of that length," he said slowly. But the stranger interrupted him.

"That does not matter; I will pay it gladly. But—"

Darcy stepped into the conversation. "I can see your point, sir. You demand some guarantee, but I don't see how we can give it. Airplanes are uncertain things at—"

"You're wrong there," Rockley interposed emphatically, stung by this slight on his machine. "We can do it—we can practically assure you."

"I offer you a thousand to do it," said Mr. Ward suddenly. "That is double your usual rate, you say. I am risking thousands in intrusting myself to your plane. Will you return me my thousand and a thousand as recompense—insurance—let us say—if you fail?"

"Certainly," replied Rock confidently. "We will not fail. You will be there within three hours."

"I take your word for it," said the passenger, stepping away from the little roll of money he had placed on the table. "If you fail to land me within three miles of Tuscard Camp by two thirty o'clock, then you return to me two thousand dollars. No papers—there is no time—I will take your word."

Doris dropped her sheaf of papers, and started toward Rock from the corner of the office.

"I give it," said Rockley promptly. "Excuse me, I must see—"

Doris stopped with troubled eyes. Rock hastened from the office. The girl slipped through the door into Darcy's office, and hurried after him.

"Rock—Rock!" she gasped as she caught up with him. "This is a swindle. I'm sure of it. There is no possible place to land near that camp. It's all deep woods. You will lose your thousand."

He halted abruptly. "How—" he began. "Nonsense! How suspicious you are, Doris! Can't you see the chap's in a frightful hurry to get to the place? Besides, I ordered the amphibian so I could land on a lake if there is no clear ground."

But although his words were emphatic, his tone was somewhat uneasy. A place to land is the prime essential of all air travel.

"You suspect him, too, now that you have time to think it over," she said with a flash of intuition. "You rushed into it without thinking."

"But—" he began, and halted. "He has a queer, unnatural way of talking, as if he'd rehearsed it all, and I did think he

was lying when he said he knew nothing about airplanes, and next minute he said: 'Gas your ship,'" Rock admitted slowly.

"It's just as palpable a swindle as if he sold you a gold brick," she insisted. "I know it—I can't tell you how, but I'm sure of it."

Rockley wrinkled his forehead. "Nobody but a pilot could think of such a swindle," he admitted. "The Adirondacks are a lovely place to find a landing field, but—Let's see; I was to land him within three miles of the camp by two thirty."

Suddenly his face cleared. "Practicality! That's the thing," he chuckled. "If he's a crook I'll defeat him. I can do it, Doris. Thanks for the warning." He swung around, and hastened toward his laboratory, leaving the girl staring rather vacantly after him.

"He—he seems to be waking up," she commented to herself. "Oh, I do hope I'm doing right in not telling him about Darcy's treachery yet."

## XI

In his laboratory Rock paused only long enough to take a small metal object from one of the drawers of a locker. Then he set off at a rapid walk down the path leading to the flying boat hangar at the edge of the bay. Doris, watching, saw that his face was resolute, with not a trace of that half-dreamy, half-perplexed expression that was so characteristic.

At the hangar Rock found the amphibian already in the water, with motor turning over smoothly. Jim was climbing, with some reluctance, into a flying suit.

"I'm flying her myself, Jim," Rock said briskly. "Will you get a couple of parachute packs out? I'm not taking any chances in this commercial flying."

Jim paused, and then got out of his suit with alacrity.

"Just as you say, boss; you need the exercise more'n I do," he said, and dived into the hangar.

When Murthoe brought Ward down the plane was ready. Rockley had donned the leather flying suit that Jim Penturn had discarded, and was being assisted into the parachute pack, which was of the type that can be worn on the back without too much discomfort.

"All set, Mr. Ward," Rock said briskly. "Just slip into this leather flying suit and parachute pack, and we're off."



Mr. Ward glanced at the parachute in deep distrust.

"Do you mean to say I have to wear that thing?" he demanded.

"A mere matter of precaution, sir," Rock reassured him. "In the event of serious breakdown, fire, or a fog that makes landing impossible it might come in handy. All you need do in an accident is simply to step from the plane.

"The release cord of the parachute is so fastened to the plane that the weight of your body, falling, jerks it, releasing the parachute from the pack as soon as you are clear of the tail and wing."

"Don't tie my rip-cord," said Mr. Ward decidedly. "I'd rather hold it myself."

"Rip-cord!" Rock muttered. "He must be a pilot."

Without further protest, Ward very awkwardly got into the leather outfit and chute harness. Rockley assisted his passenger to enter the rear compartment in the boat hull of the amphibian, and then took his own place in the operating cockpit.

Rock folded several maps Jim had handed him so that he could consult them without risk of losing them in the high wind, and tucked them away in a pocket in the side of the cockpit.

Then, with a farewell nod at the group on shore, he opened the throttle, and the amphibian glided over the water. Once clear of the land, Sutherland swung into the wind and shot ahead.

Before he reached the end of the peninsula the big craft was in the air. Heading down the Sound toward New York, he climbed steadily, allowing himself fifteen hundred feet of altitude for emergencies in the narrow waters of the Harlem River and the ship canal.

Once over the Hudson, Rockley settled down more comfortably in his seat, and prepared for a trip. There was a light wind from the north, a wind that increased with the altitude; so Rock brought the ship down again until he was only ten or fifteen feet from the surface of the water. Then he straightened out, and let her roar.

Not once, while the mono-amphibian sped up the Hudson and over the lakes beyond it, did the motor falter, and not once did Rock turn to survey his passenger. While he had no definite knowledge that "Mr. Ward" was a fraud, he nevertheless had suspected the gentleman vaguely, even before Doris had spoken.

He impressed Rock not so much as a big business man, as he did as an actor, playing a part. The way he had displayed that money was decidedly theatrical. But Rockley had not suspected that his game, whatever it was, was directed against him, until Doris had come to him.

Now he was half convinced that she was right. Certainly Mr. Ward had carefully refrained from speaking of landing field or lakes. And he had been so ready to trust Rock—that was suspicious, too.

A great anger swelled in his breast at the thought of this man daring to try to swindle him, when on his success so much depended. If he was an aviator, then he was a traitor, indeed.

Mild enough where his own interests were concerned, Rockley Sutherland was enough of a zealot to fight fiercely when the welfare of aviation was threatened.

As the Adirondacks rose into view ahead—mere green-clad mole hills, for Rockley had climbed after leaving the river—he became more grimly determined than ever that Mr. Ward would not walk blandly into his office and demand his money, and Rock's sorely needed thousand. No; Mr. Ward would be taken to his destination.

Rock consulted his map. They were over Lake Champlain now, and Tuscand Camp lay some miles inland, to the west. He knew the country slightly—forest land, heavily timbered, with chains of lakes running through it, and here and there settlements of a sort.

It was the worst country in the world for an airplane to fly over, and almost as bad for a flying boat. In this one machine Rock had facilities for coming down on land or water, but even then—well, minutes now would tell whether the suspicions of Doris and himself were justified.

Rockley consulted his compass and large scale map frequently. He had questioned Ward carefully concerning the location of the camp, and now he had little difficulty in finding his way above that green wilderness. He was keeping, as well as he could estimate, about three thousand feet above the rugged forest land.

Intent upon his course, he wasted no effort in an attempt to talk to the passenger behind him. But just once, as they neared the location of the camp, he turned quickly and looked at his passenger.

Ward, helmeted and goggled, had been staring at the back of Rock's head, and the

pilot caught upon his mouth a derisive grin. It vanished instantly, but in that moment of unguardedness Rockley read confirmation of his suspicion.

This was simply a bunco game of a new type. There was no possible way of landing a plane anywhere around Tuscard Camp. Ward knew that, and he was laughing at Sutherland. And later he would demand that thousand dollars.

Rock could picture Ward's maddening attitude of reluctance in taking the guarantee, while inwardly he mocked him for a dupe. Well—the hot anger that surged in Rockley died away, and he smiled in turn, facing the fierce rush of the gale—Mr. Ward might be surprised.

Ahead Rockley caught sight of a small clearing on the precipitous side of one of the green hills. In it rose the buildings of a sizable, somewhat pretentious "camp," done in the rustic, cabin style. A small stream, foam white, gushed down the mountain beside it.

This, according to map and description, was Tuscard Camp. Rock, at a glance, dismissed its possibilities as a landing place. Stumps arose all over the cleared ground, and the slant alone made it impossible as a landing place. He glanced at the clock on the instrument board. It was twenty-five minutes of two; he had kept his bargain.

He turned again to Ward, throttling the motor as he did so. The amphibian, headed slightly downward in a glide, slipped through the air, with only a gentle hum from wires and slowing propeller. But the air continued to sweep by, making hearing difficult.

"Tuscard?" shouted Rock, pointing at the camp below them.

Ward nodded emphatically.

"Where do we land?"

Ward shrugged his shoulders and waved his hand toward Rock, as if to indicate that that was his problem.

"Anywhere," he shouted. "Hurry!"

"Any lake or field near?" Rock demanded.

Again Ward shrugged his shoulders, and his lips moved in some speech that did not reach Rock against the thrust of the wind. Rockley turned to the front again, and there was decision in his face.

"I'll give him every chance," he muttered, and began to sweep about the country around the camp. Traveling in a great circle at a radius of about three miles from

the camp, he examined the ground with a careful eye. There was no lake, no meadow, no place in which a landing could even be attempted. Tuscard Camp was indeed in the wilds.

Rock bent gently to the floor, and fumbled with the little metal object that he had brought from his laboratory. Then he straightened again, and continued to search the ground with keen eyes. No more did he turn back toward Ward for aid; ostensibly his whole attention was fixed upon the forest land below. He brought the ship down to five hundred feet above the tree tops, and headed for the camp.

Ward, in the rear cockpit, was smiling again, one hand to his mouth to prevent Rock from detecting his amusement. But suddenly he ceased to grin, and coughed. From somewhere smoke was drifting into his cockpit.

It was dense black smoke, like gasoline smoke, that eddied about in the disturbed vortices set up by the speed of the plane, and then rising to the rim, swept backward instantly, thinned to invisibility, and whisked away by the wind. But in the cockpit it grew denser—rapidly.

Ward leaned forward and pounded Rock upon the back.

Rockley, turning, looked into the contorted, horrified face of his passenger, and then his eyes swept back to the cockpit, which was vomiting black vapor like a devil's caldron. Instantly he cut off the motor.

Already the black smoke was so dense that it was no longer instantly dissipated by the wind. It hung about the whole machine; even in Rock's cockpit it drifted upward.

"Fire! Gasoline! Explosion!" roared Rockley, and in his excitement he twisted the wheel. The plane moved like a shying horse; the sure serenity of its flight disappeared; it wavered in the air, dreadfully uncertain. At the same time Rock reached for the rip cord of his own parachute, and started to leave the control seat.

At the sight of the pilot's obvious panic, Ward waited no longer. He went over the side in a quick, neat dive, cleared the tail, and jerked his rip cord an instant later.

Like a magic flower, a huge expanse of silk blossomed above the passenger's head as he dropped earthward. His progress was checked at once; he swung in great

arcs at the end of the shrouds. "A very efficient 'chute jump," Rock confided to the wind.

He bent and tossed the still active smoke bomb over the side. Then he banked hastily, and circled widely about the parachuting Mr. Ward. That gentleman was descending slowly and quite gracefully near the edge of the clearing.

Rock saw him carried past a big maple, and alight, with enough force to knock him from his feet, in a clump of bushes. Mr. Ward's contract had been fulfilled.

An instant later, the collapsed parachute trailing behind him, he emerged from the bushes and gazed intently upward at the plane. Not a vestige—not a solitary streamer of smoke now floated away behind it. Ward raised both clenched fists in the air; then suddenly, jerked a revolver from under his coat and fired.

One bullet clipped through the wing, but the others went wild.

Rock, startled for a moment by the quick ferocity of the attack, stared down at the raging man below.

"A very hard customer," he murmured. He waved his hand cheerily, to show the gunman he had missed, and started climbing rapidly.

But, as he headed for Lake Champlain, his face was grim, and without a trace of merriment. Sutherland had never been fired at before, and it was an experience that kept his mind upon it.

"That was a rotten trick I played him, and I'm ashamed of it," he confided to the gale. "But I've got to win, and whoever tries to stop me is going to suffer. I'll never see Ward again. But I wonder just how he happened to select me as his victim."

His face continued to bear evidence of the sober nature of his thought the whole of the long way back to Soundview. If he had realized how wrong he was about encountering Mr. Ward again, however, his meditations might have been even more somber in tone.

## XII

JEFFERSON MURTHOE was very much annoyed, and when he was in that condition it was his custom to do something very suddenly and very forcefully about it.

In the first place he had most unwillingly contributed a thousand dollars to Rockley Sutherland's transportation fund. That

was jarring, because it helped Rock on his way to his twenty-five thousand dollar goal. It also put Mr. Murthoe somewhat behind in cash at a time when ready money was a very handy thing to have around.

In the second place Mr. Murthoe had been carrying on an affair in Wall Street which had given every indication of a happy ending, but the finale had most unfortunately taken the wrong turn, and now seemed further off than when Mr. Murthoe had first entered upon his little speculation.

Consequently he sat in his private office in the Seven Rivers Building, not thirty feet from the office of Spencer Sutherland, and gazed at the ceiling with an entire absence of that good humor for which he was noted.

Perhaps the fact that he was in a state of indecision, most unusual in him, had something to do with his state of temper. He wanted to do something, and yet he was afraid to do it.

What he wanted to do was to wring Rock Sutherland's neck, and he knew that that was the most unwise thing he could possibly contemplate.

But angry as he was at Rockley Sutherland, his feelings were amicable in the extreme as compared to those of Mr. Ward. That gentleman, bearing the marks of his parachute descent on his scratched face, had arrived at Murthoe's apartment after a long train trip in a state of wrath that was almost incoherent.

"He bluffed me!" he rasped. "Damn him; he made a monkey out of me! I'll pay him back if I have to make a corpse out o' him to do it!"

"Calm down!" commanded Jefferson Murthoe. "There'll be another chance in the next month or two of hitting him where it will hurt—below the belt, if you want. But don't try anything yourself if—"

He stared meaningly at the aviator whose past he knew so well, and went on sweetly:

"—if you value my friendship."

And so Ward was compelled to go into hiding and brood over his defeat without a single attempt at revenge. Which suited the astute Mr. Murthoe exactly, as he knew well the hate engendered by suppression. When next he used Ward against Rock Sutherland he would have a very keen and eager instrument indeed.

Jefferson Murthoe did not quite under-

stand why he felt so uneasy about Rock. That young man, he knew, was facing a practically impossible task in attempting to make twenty-five thousand dollars out of aerial transportation within six months. Perhaps his irritation, Murthoe reflected, was due to the fact that Rockley ignored entirely the fact that his task was an impossible one.

Just now, according to the latest report from his son Darcy, Rock had spent most of the one thousand dollars he himself had contributed so unwillingly, through the mysterious Mr. Ward, as well as the original thousand, in advertising, in a vain attempt to rouse the American people from their indifference to aviation.

On this August 14, a little more than three months after Mr. Sutherland had given his son six months to make good, Rock was doing a little business—a very little, in legitimate aerial transportation of passengers.

His advertisements of speed were pulling feebly. A few people trickled in cars to the Soundview field, intent upon reaching their summer places at Newport, Narragansett Pier, Southampton; and others for a week-end, without spending a day, or half a day, to get there.

A few others, attracted by the novelty of the thing, or by a real need of speed, applied by telephone for transportation by flying boat from the public seaplane base on the Hudson River at Eighty-Third Street to the Jersey coast, or to cities up the Hudson.

Rock, Jim Penturn, and Jake Grimpen, in turn, carried passengers, and carried them swiftly. Rockley toiled the hardest of all—seemingly indefatigable—and, strangely enough, it did not seem to hurt him. Although Darcy had always regarded Rock as a weakling, unable to do more than dream dreams at a desk, he now spent hours in the air during the week-ends, when business was brisk.

In the midweek he devoted himself to such laborious tasks as "tearing down" a motor in need of overhaul, rigging a ship, or—when theory temporarily overcame practicality—installing a radio direction finder in a plane for a test against the day when airlines would be controlled by wireless stations at landing fields stretching across the continent.

In short, Rock was displaying more of old Spencer Sutherland's genius for getting

things done than Jefferson Murthoe cared to see.

Had he but known the actual thoughts of Rock, Murthoe would not have felt so uneasy. With the actual transformation of Soundview from an experimental station to a commercial aerodrome, Rockley had come to realize what a hard thing money is to acquire, particularly twenty-five thousand dollars.

But he kept his lower and upper lips straight, and worked as hard as a man can work all day. In the evening he spent unpleasant hours over a little memorandum book in which he kept account of income from transportation.

"There doesn't seem to be much chance, but I'm going down fighting," he said grimly to himself. "I'll show Doris I'm no quitter, at least."

His speech, during those days in which he alternated as pilot and mechanic, had become crisper, more terse; for the vocabulary of an aeronautical theorist failed to fit into his work.

It was not extraordinary that he should think of Doris rather than of his father in connection with his task, for the girl was forever before his eyes during the day.

And sometimes she was friendly, and at other times she was too overcome with mirth at the thought of Rockley becoming practical to be particularly pleasant to talk to. On such occasions he left her abruptly, and tackled the hardest task in sight with a grim, ruthless determination that somehow accomplished results that were most remarkable.

But of course Jefferson Murthoe knew nothing of the inward despair of Rock, since Rockley gave no indication to Darcy Murthoe on the field that he thought his task a hopeless one.

And since he could not wring Rock's neck for causing him all this uneasiness, old Murthoe contemplated some other means of evening up matters with Rock or with his father, and at the same time of dragging himself out of the financial hole into which the failure of arrival of the happy ending had dropped him. It took some thinking, that, but strangely enough it was the elder Sutherland who supplied the clew.

The railroad president came rushing into his lieutenant's office in his usual rapid-fire style, and dropped into a chair almost before Murthoe had time to withdraw his



eyes from the ceiling and resume his air of complete contentment with life.

"Jeff," said Spencer Sutherland, "I have to bother you about this, but the Pendleton executor is going to sell that block of Seven Rivers Railroad to pay the inheritance taxes. Fifty thousand shares! Selling that much on the open market is going to put Seven Rivers considerably lower than it is now. That's bad."

Murthoe said nothing, but nodded thoughtfully. The late Pendleton, a director of the road, had left a huge estate, and that fifty thousand shares, then selling at about eighty on the Stock Exchange, would just about pay the various levies.

"If we can take the block over ourselves and sell it gradually, we won't hit the market a terrible jolt and give our stockholders a shock that will destroy their confidence in the road," Sutherland said.

With every appearance of regret Jefferson Murthoe shook his head. "I'm sorry, Spence," he answered, "but I'm not so well fixed now as I might be. Oh, no; nothing serious, but it would cost me a lot of money to get out of what I'm in now. The market hasn't been behaving right."

Spencer Sutherland ran an anxious hand over his head.

"It's all right, Jeff; don't worry about it," he said reassuringly. "Maybe I can swing it myself. But you're right about the market. I saw what looked like an opportunity to make a turn myself—something that would give us a good bit of ready cash for the preliminary work on the new road in the fall, but—well, my Seven Rivers holdings are all pledged now."

"Money is tight—I hate to load up on a thin margin, especially with a block of fifty thousand, but I hate worse to see Seven Rivers booted about like one of the cats and dogs on the Exchange."

Jefferson Murthoe reiterated his sorrow, and added a few optimistic words concerning the ease with which a man like Sutherland could find assistance. "Let me know how it goes," he said, as his chief left.

"I'll manage it somehow," Sutherland declared.

Murthoe remained in his comfortable armchair until the door closed. Then he did something most unusual, for him. He heaved his big body onto his feet, and strode in rising excitement up and down.

"One man's difficulty is another man's opportunity," he muttered. "Maybe this

will—I'll watch him like a cat. I have no objection to nicking the old fool good—provided I can do it in secret."

### XIII

BUT while all these dull financial details—dull save to those to whom they were of supreme importance—were being mulled over in Wall Street, matters of more interest were afoot at Soundview Field.

Darcy Murthoe, in Rockley's office, was having a very serious conversation with Doris Earlston, apparently somewhat against her will, since he was prudently standing between her and the door.

"Look here, Doris," the business manager was saying, "we've been awfully good friends for quite awhile, and we've had a lot of fun together out of watching Rock flounder around making a blithering idiot of himself. It's all been mighty nice. But it's gone further than friendship with me, and—well, we ought to have a little understanding."

He stepped forward, his arms reaching passionately for her, but she retreated lithely around Rock's big table. Her eyes were on his, but the light in them was not tender. It was merely puzzled.

Doris had, perhaps, invited this situation by her desire to keep close enough to Darcy to assure herself he plotted no evil against Rockley. But she certainly had not expected this. She repressed a little shiver of dread and distaste as she gazed at Darcy, who was coming on quite confidently.

"No—no!" she whispered. "You mustn't, Darcy! Please!"

He mistook her agitation for sweet confusion, and smiled somewhat fatuously as he pressed after her.

"There—there," he soothed. "It's sudden, Doris, but you must have known how I love you, and— What have you been doing at Soundview all these weeks if you didn't like me a little? I suppose you want me to believe it was because you were anxious to help Rock?" He laughed at this thought.

Doris wanted to cry out that he had spoken the truth—that it was to aid Rockley she had come—to urge poor, dreamy, impractical Rock along a hard path to manhood, and yet to protect him from the danger that Darcy, who so blandly assumed her love of him, threatened.

She was tired of this burdensome rôle

of never ceasing alertness that she had laid upon herself, but she did not speak frankly. That would have been disloyal to Rock, so blind to the villainy—and love—of others.

"You—you must not think that I—" she began, but again he pressed forward impetuously, and broke in:

"Well, we won't talk about that, then, Doris, but we both know that Rock's not the attraction." She had come close to the outer door, and stretched out a hand to open it. Darcy rushed forward, caught her in his arms, and triumphantly drew her away from it.

"The blundering fool has really brought us together, Doris," he declared.

But suddenly he stopped dead, and the hand with which he had been trying to raise her head to his fell away. Doris, face flushed scarlet with the shame of it, looked up.

There, right beside them in the doorway, his helmet gripped tight in his hand, stood Rockley. His face was bewildered, as Doris had seen it once when she had abruptly aroused him from his calculations there at that table. But in his eyes there was pain, as well, and a sorrow that pierced her heart as he halted there.

Then, quite abruptly, the power of motion returned to him. He turned, and left them without a word. The door shut behind him.

Darcy released her at once, staring at the door as if it were Rock.

"Phew!" he exclaimed. "Wonder if he heard what I said about him? I've got to make it up with him somehow. My father would—rip me in two if Rock fired me now."

Doris roused herself. She heard faintly the words of Darcy, and knew them for an open admission to her that he was there as a spy and a trouble maker. But that did not seem important now.

The pain in Rock's eyes was what mattered, and she longed to rush out and smooth that pain away.

But how could she? What could she say? Her heart fluttered. Did that expression of pain mean anything more than that this apparent deceit of hers and of Darcy's had wounded him. How could she tell?

She turned to Darcy, but her eyes avoided his. If once he looked into them now, not all the acting in the world would con-

ceal from him the honest contempt, the utter loathing, she felt for him.

"I'm going home," she said faintly, and fled into the air.

Although Rockley walked quite calmly away from his office, his feet steady and his face once more expressionless, a fury of emotion surged within him. Steadily he made his way over to the airplane with idling motor, which he had just quit, and climbed into the cockpit without a word to Jake Grimpén, who stood by it.

His movements as he took off were quite mechanical; the one thought that ruled over the chaos in his brain was a desire to get far away from the field, from Doris, and from Darcy, from every one and everything.

He put the fast plane into a rapid, circling ascent, and soared up into the region of cold, clean, empty air, while the motor, like another stricken brain, hammered out its conflicting dissonances. He heard those words of Darcy. "Rock's not the attraction. The blundering fool has really brought us together, Doris." He heard them still.

But though they were Darcy's words, young Murthoe hardly entered into the tumult in his head. For a long time Rock, in his sensitiveness, had perceived that Darcy thought him an idle dreamer, yes, even a fool of a sort.

But Rockley, possessed of a sense of humor, which is also a sense of proportion, had not resented that. After all, any practical man of affairs such as Darcy might well think that of a peculiar person like himself. That was not extraordinary, nor was it a thing to bear a grudge about.

But that Doris—to whom he had gone so often and told so much of his hopes and plans—that she should permit Darcy to jeer at him in secret—that she should let Darcy hold her in his arms—that she should love Darcy—The thought tore at him.

He realized now that he loved Doris; that he had loved her for some time. The thing was quite plain. Whenever, arousing himself from his abstractions, he had had need of her, she had been there. She had never been missing when he needed consolation, or even that gentle mockery of hers that so stimulated him. Consequently he had never understood what she meant to him.

But now the picture of a world without Doris loomed like a nightmare before him. Her mockery, then, had been real, not assumed, he thought in agony.

"I've been a fool to think that she ever regarded me as anything but a curiosity," he muttered. "After all, that's what I am—a queer, unfriendly specimen. I haven't a real friend in the world, and I've treated my own father as if he were a sort of bank. Why should she see in me anything but a subject for laughter? That's what I am—a joke!"

He felt an overpowering impulse to turn the nose of the plane westward and leave it all behind—Doris, Soundview, his office, his designs, and the hard struggle to win his father's backing. He was flying in a swift two-seater. Many a gypsy flyer who pursued a nomadic existence, giving passengers flights in one town till fancy urged him on to another, had no more equipment than that.

In such a life there was no disheartening and hopeless fight, no work all day and worry all night; no responsibility and no relentless duty—nothing but a little flying, new people, new sights, new thoughts, refreshing sleep, and revivifying leisure.

With a savage movement of the stick and rudder bar he swung the ship around and raced westward with the sun. The broken coast line of the North Shore drifted by beneath him, and then the bridge and the old red brick and black roofs of the city.

The Hudson, with its liners snug in berths and its surface speckled with ferries, motor boats, car barges, tugs, and yachts, stretched beneath him, like a dividing line between the old life of endeavor and the new life of indifference.

And then Rock, with a shake of his head, banked grimly over the gray waters, and swung back to the eastward.

"You can't run away, man," he said aloud. "You've got to stay and do your damndest, and go down like a gentleman. No sniveling because a girl rightly thinks you're funny, and no sneaking away because you know you're beaten and are afraid to be beaten fighting. Go back and take your medicine!"

He flew again across the city, with jaws set. The peninsula that was Soundview grew large again; the green stretch of the flying field expanded. He set the ship down with gentle sureness.

It was a relief to Rock when he found that Doris's car was gone from in front of the office. Although he was now outwardly quite as calm and sedate as in the days when he was entirely engrossed in the world of the theoretical, he trembled inwardly at the thought of encountering the girl. He would not know what to do; how to bear the pain of it, and just then he felt he could stand no more tearing at his heart.

He entered his office, not without wincing at the thought of what that door had revealed when last he opened it. The room was empty. He glanced through the door connecting with Darcy's room. His business manager was at his desk, hunched over as if expecting a blow.

Rockley paused. He must be just. He was paying Murthoe for doing a certain task, and Darcy, as far as he could judge, was doing the task well. The fact that Darcy regarded him as a fool had nothing to do with his position. And the fact that young Murthoe and Doris loved each other likewise had no bearing on the matter of Darcy's employment. He must be just.

"Did we do any better last week-end, Darcy?" he asked quietly. "It seems to me that I carried more passengers than usual."

Darcy Murthoe sprang to his feet. Usually so matter-of-fact, he stammered and spoke almost incoherently in his relief.

"Week-end? Yes, we did—much better. Haven't got the exact amount, just yet, but—"

"Let me see the total when you get it," Rock said, rather wearily. "I want to do some calculating to-night."

Darcy sank back into his chair, his apprehension gone. It was not Rockley he feared, but his father's wrath, if at this stage of the game he should be compelled to leave Soundview. But he need not have worried, he reflected; he should have known that Rock would be as quixotic as usual, and yet as scientifically unemotional.

"I'll get the figures for you at once, Rock," he promised.

#### XIV

IN the offices of the Seven Rivers Railroad, Spencer Sutherland, too, was having his troubles, but they were entirely financial, and, moreover, he was much too old and too wise a man to let them reach a critical stage.

Speculators who made their living by trading in and out of various securities whose ups and downs they stimulated secretly but skillfully, had learned that Seven Rivers was an excellent stock to keep away from. Sutherland was quick to detect even the slightest attempt at manipulation of the market for this stock, and equally as quick to act.

His determination that the value of Seven Rivers should rest upon the prospects of the road and the current gross and net earnings, and not upon the whims or desires of a coterie of operators, was so well known that one philosophical gambler had nicknamed him "the Cerberus of the Seven Rivers."

The problem of preventing the unloading of a block of fifty thousand shares of the railroad's stock, with a consequent downward plunge of the price on the Exchange, was a serious one. Such an action might possibly result in a small panic among the legitimate investors scattered all over the country, who regarded the stock as gilt-edged, and entirely free from the wild gyrations that, at the time, other securities were indulging in.

Sutherland was swinging the job. He had entered upon negotiations with an old friend of his, John Ruylen, a partner in the well-known firm of Danforth, Ruylen, and Hutchins, to take over the block and dispose of it so gradually that the market would be practically undisturbed.

He had talked the matter over carefully with Jefferson Murthoe, and the big director had agreed that this was by far the best way to do it. Therefore it seemed certain that Seven Rivers would remain a staid and dignified security on the Stock Exchange.

"I'll make delivery of the block to Danforth, Ruylen, and Hutchins on Saturday morning, and Ruylen assures me they'll unload it so slowly that those tin-horn gamblers"—it was thus that Spencer Sutherland referred to a little group of operators who had once raided his railroad—"will never know what's being done."

Jefferson Murthoe nodded gravely. "That's a good plan, Spencer, a splendid plan," he agreed.

"It seems so, Jeff," Sutherland said. "Ruylen has practically promised me that he won't let any of it go at less than eighty, even if they have to hold on to it for a time themselves. Always barring any big flurry

in the market, of course—Ruylen's no philanthropist."

"Philanthropists are scarce in Wall Street until after the gong rings at three o'clock," Murthoe commented dryly, with a glance at his chief. "You're turning it over Saturday morning, then?"

"That's the time, though, of course, they won't do anything about it until Monday. By the way, Jeff, several fellows have asked me lately about the Seven Rivers going into the Andiman merger. Of course I've told them there's no truth in the rumor, but it seems to hang on. Anybody asked you about it?"

Murthoe nodded. "One man did," he admitted.

"We must step on that bit of gossip hard, Jeff. I don't want that gang to kite the price of Seven Rivers sky high on the strength of it, unload their holdings, and let it drop again. Damn it, Seven Rivers is a railroad, not a roulette wheel. I won't have that sort of thing, if I can stop it."

Murthoe rubbed his big jaw reflectively, and concealed a nervous twist of his lips behind his hand.

"Of course not," he said. "I'll nail the lie wherever I can."

The president of the road moved restlessly up and down on his colleague's carpet.

"It's going to be a terrible wrench to leave old Seven Rivers to launch this new transcontinental, Jeff," he said. "Oh, don't think I'm backing down on it—I meant just what I said—the Sutherland family's going ahead in transportation as they always have done, but I can't help wishing Rock would show a little life and prove that aviation means something."

"Sometimes I think I'd a good deal rather sit tight in the Seven Rivers chair, and let young blood—Rock, I mean—carry on in the air."

"That attitude is, of course, quite reasonable," agreed Jefferson Murthoe urbanely. "Why not let down the bars a bit for Rock—make it ten thousand dollars instead of twenty-five thousand dollars? Don't for a moment consider my hopes of the transcontinental; anything that Rock does to convince you that aerial transportation is practicable will convince me."

Old Spencer Sutherland stared at his friend.

"Let down the bars? No, sir! A Sutherland in the transportation business lets



down no bars—he raises 'em higher, and he goes over 'em, too. The boy's got to do something, and do something big.

"So far all he's done is carry a few idiots to their country houses, or on short trips up the Hudson, or down the coast. That's not enough—there's no money, and not much in the way of demonstration in that."

"Well, of course, that is for you to decide," Murthoe murmured, and directed a secret smile at the ceiling.

Sutherland turned toward the door.

"We're pretty well out of that disposal hole, thank the Lord," he said. "I expect the executor to turn over the block to me Friday, and Saturday morning I'll make delivery to John Ruylen. That's the time he specified in our agreement. Shouldn't wonder if he'd made a few moves toward placing it already."

"It's a good way out," Jefferson Murthoe agreed, but as the door closed behind his friend, he murmured urbanely: "Or a good way into trouble for you—and some real solid cash for me."

He leaned back in his chair reflectively, but not for long. With extraordinary agility he got up, bent over, and rescued the morning paper from the wastebasket. Then he turned to the shipping page, and studied it carefully.

At last he chuckled, and nodded approval.

"That's the best way to do it," he muttered. "The surest, and the safest. And it ought to pull me out of this left-handed mess I've got into and leave a neat profit besides."

Jack Cameron was the office boy that Spencer Sutherland generally employed to do his errands, owing to the fact that he had been well recommended by a Stock Exchange firm. On this particular Saturday morning he was busy figuring out how to eat his lunch during office hours.

As is not unusual, Jack had ideas of his own concerning how to spend a Saturday afternoon. By lunching while out on this delivery of stock to Danforth, Ruylen, and Hutchins, he would reach Manhattan Beach at least twenty minutes before it would be possible otherwise. And there was nothing that Jack craved more than a dive into the Atlantic Ocean on that hot, sticky day.

It was decidedly annoying that, just as he was leaving, old Jefferson Murthoe

popped out of his office and confronted him. He ruthlessly demanded Jack's services, ignoring the plea that he was on an errand for Mr. Sutherland, and ordered him into his office.

Mr. Murthoe had spilled the contents of a drawer on the floor, and it was much too hot a day, and he was much too large of girth to pick up all the papers and other contents himself. Consequently Jack spent some time on the job, for the director was quite fussy about the neat rearrangement of the contents, and too busy to do it himself.

And when Jack had finished, Murthoe declared that a tiny pin he had brought for a young niece was missing, and Jack spent another ten minutes crawling about under the desk, until finally he found it under the edge of the carpet.

However, a dollar tip soothed his feelings at the end of his task.

Consequently, feeling at peace with the world, he tucked the leather wallet containing the fifty thousand shares of Seven Rivers common under his arm, and leaving the Seven Rivers Building, headed rapidly for a clattering lunch room where he stoked his stomach with a ham sandwich, a malted milk, and a plate of strawberry ice cream. No one attempted to wrest the wallet from him, and Jack hadn't the least fear that any one would.

Common stock is valuable—sometimes—to its owner, but not to any one else. Jack had very little concern for common stock, although he was quite careful when he was carrying cash or bonds.

At the building which housed Danforth, Ruylen, and Hutchins, Jack, perspiring freely and wondering why that ice cream hadn't cooled him more, was shot up to the sixteenth floor and popped automatically into the tiny bare anteroom, partitioned off from the rest of the office, where were located several little windows bearing the legends: "Deliveries," "Comparisons," "C. H. Tickets," "Checks," *et cetera*.

As it was a dull summer Saturday, there was no other office boy in the cubby hole, with its old wooden bench, but there was a coatless individual, almost stout, wearing a brown, heavy mustache as if he liked to do so. His hand was on the knob of the door leading from the inner office, and he had obviously just come out of it.

Jack surveyed him without interest, and the man in shirt sleeves paid no attention

whatever to him. He walked over to the comparison window, and picked up from the floor a red-lettered slip that had obviously blown through the slit at the bottom of the little window.

Then he turned and headed back toward the office door, but just as he laid his hand upon it he seemed to see Jack for the first time.

"You aren't the boy from the Seven Rivers with the fifty thousand shares of common, are you?" he questioned, as if quite confident that the answer would be "No."

"That's me," replied Jack, opening his wallet, and taking out the stocks.

The man paused, and his eyes widened in an emotion that made Jack look at him with some attention. He was so impressive in appearance that the boy catalogued him as the cashier of the brokerage firm, at the very least.

"You are! Where have you been? Why didn't you get here before this? Mr. Danforth's gone."

"What of it?" demanded Jack. His conscience, by no means tender, nevertheless gave a slight twinge. It was apparent from this mustached gentleman's agitation that something was quite wrong. "The office is still open, ain't it?"

"Mr. Danforth himself has been waiting since eleven o'clock for that stock, and the boat sails at twelve thirty. He just left for the pier this instant. You certainly are in for it!"

"In for what?" demanded Jack Cameron sullenly.

The employee of Danforth, Ruylen, and Hutchins seemed quite astounded at the stupidity of this boy. He put one trembling hand to his head. Jack stared at him uneasily. He saw a good job vanishing.

"If you shoot away now you'll just about make it! Mr. Danforth is to take that stock abroad with him for European customers. Hurry up! The Blue Mail Pier—Steamship Fredonian! Give it to the purser for him if you can't find him. But be quick! Run!"

Jack ran. He stuffed the stock back into the wallet, played an agitated tune upon the elevator flash, exchanged rapid words with the operator concerning the speed of his car, and bolted out of the building. Like a boy-size projectile he shot down Rector Street and leaped up the Ninth Avenue Elevated steps. In the leisurely train he had

time to collect his breath and figure that he might reach the pier.

"Never again!" he told himself. "Next time I eat lunch at Manhattan Beach and take a chance on gettin' cramps in the water."

Eventually he left the Elevated, and fled down to West Street. Taxicabs were still parked near the pier, but it was quite apparent that people were leaving, not coming with baggage.

But the gangplank still stretched to the ship. Longshoremen stood by to pull it away at the signal. Nevertheless there was still a chance to save his job. He bolted past the restraining arms of the official at the foot of the gangway, and shot up its steep incline.

"Important! Purser!" he gasped, and an officer pointed the way, and added a curt admonition to hurry. Jack dashed down the steps and sighted the inquiry office, with its busy white-uniformed functionaries. It took some worming to get through the crowd of passengers around them, but Jack wormed well.

"Purser? Delivery for Mr. Danforth! Important!"

"All right, boy," said one of the harassed uniforms, and stretched out a hand impatiently. Jack thrust the folded stock certificates into it and fled. He made the pier without difficulty. Then, mopping his dripping head and calming his heaving chest, he watched indignantly while ten minutes elapsed before a whistle shrilled and the gangplank was lowered to the deck.

"I could 'a' given them to old Danforth himself," he thought. "But I saved my job, anyhow."

He went back to the office, with conscience eased, but said nothing to any one about the matter, and was very much relieved when no one said anything to him about it. The least he had expected was a terrific bawling out.

But could he have seen what happened in the outer office of Danforth, Ruylen, and Hutchins after his abrupt departure, he might not have enjoyed his swim that afternoon quite so much.

For the gentleman with the mustache, who was none other than Rock Sutherland's mysterious customer-in-a-hurry and most bitter enemy, Ward, waited in the empty place until Jack had leaped into the elevator. Then he retrieved his coat and hat from under the wooden bench and depart-

ed, without a single employee of the brokerage firm realizing that he had been there at all.

And in his Park Avenue apartment that afternoon, Jeff Murthoe, after a telephone call from Mr. Ward, was very much his amiable self, and gazed at the ceiling as benevolently as if he had decided to give its spotless surface a coating of pure gold.

## XV

ON the following Monday morning Rockley Sutherland did an extraordinary thing—for him. Since he had come to believe that Doris had laughed at him and deserted him, he had been lonely, and with this loneliness had come a thought that perhaps his father, too, was lonesome. His conscience pricked him at the thought of how he had gone to New York to see his father only at long intervals, and then always to request some more money for his aeronautical research work.

Having decided, then, that he was at fault, Rock, with his usual keen sense of justice, left Soundview on an early train to make such amends as he could. So chastened was he that he even refrained from mental criticisms of railroads in general and in particular.

At the Seven Rivers building Rock was received with enthusiasm and punctiliously suppressed curiosity by his father.

"How are you, boy?" the president of the Seven Rivers asked, after he had seen his son seated with a politeness which was as far toward affection as he dared go. This dreamy-eyed ugly duckling of his was too much a puzzle to him to permit any display of fatherly love.

"I'm all right," Rock answered rather stiffly.

"You're looking great," said old Sutherland, emphatically. "Filled out some, Indian brown, and—er—somewhat more active looking."

Rock smiled rather wryly. "The task you put me to has accomplished that, although I haven't done much to the task," he admitted.

His father looked at him longingly. "Rock, maybe I was a bit too severe," he began, but his son interrupted.

"Not at all, father. I am quite convinced that large sums of money may be made in commercial flying, even in its present stage. What I regret is that I am not the type of man to make it pay. It is a

failure of me, not of aviation, that will be demonstrated at the end of the test."

"Not getting along very well, then?" Sutherland asked.

Rock smiled again. "The returns aren't great, as yet, but we're going ahead as hard as we can," he said grimly. "But that isn't what I—"

The telephone shrilled an imperious demand for attention. "Sorry. Just a moment, son," said Rock's father.

Rock looked out over the lower bay, but found himself listening.

"Hello, Ruylen," his father said amiably. "Moved any of that Seven Rivers yet? All? How—what?"

At the sound of that staccato exclamation Rock turned his head to survey his father's face. Sutherland went on:

"Why, of course we did, John. Delivery was made to you Saturday. Wait a moment; I'll make sure."

He laid down the receiver, and pressed a button.

"Says his office hasn't received a block of stock I sent him Saturday," he muttered to Rock. "And he's sold it all this morning on a sudden bulge in the market." His face reflected some uneasiness as he awaited a reply to his summons, but the grip of his teeth on his cigar was steady and unmoving.

Jack Cameron was not long in appearing.

"Jack, you made that delivery of fifty thousand shares of Seven Rivers to Danforth, Ruylen, and Hutchins, Saturday, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy promptly. "Mr. Danforth had left the office when I got there, but I made the boat and turned it over to the purser."

Spencer Sutherland took his cigar out of his mouth and laid it carefully on the edge of his glass-topped desk. Then he leaned forward slightly in his chair.

"You turned it over to whom, Jack?" he asked, his voice low and quite controlled. His eyes dwelt with abrupt attention upon the boy.

"To the purser of the Fredonian, sir," Jack replied. It occurred to him that Mr. Sutherland did not know that the stock was to be disposed of in Europe, so he explained:

"When I got to the delivery window over there, a man—looked like maybe the cashier—told me to rush it to the boat—

that Mr. Danforth was taking it abroad with him. I just made it, and gave it to the purser, like he said. Is—"

Sutherland's feet hit the floor, but his voice was still quite calm.

"All right, Jack; nothing serious. I just wanted to know. Who was the man in the Danforth office? Had you ever seen him before?"

"You never see any of those birds, making deliveries, Mr. Sutherland," Jack answered. "You just shove the stuff through the window at them, and then wait till they shove a check back at you, if your office tells you a check is coming. But this man happened to be in the outer office picking up something that fell through a window."

"I see," said Sutherland, and he raised a hand to his brow. "In the outer office, I see. That's all, Jack. Never mind telling any one about this."

"No, sir," said the boy. He went out, somewhat perplexed, but not unduly alarmed. As soon as the door had closed behind him, Spencer Sutherland darted to the telephone.

"Hello, Ruylen; sorry to keep you waiting. I'm coming over to see you right away. Yes."

As he hung up the receiver Spencer Sutherland's face was gray.

"Crooked work, Rock, and—"

He walked over to the ticker in a corner of the room and took the tape in his shaking hands.

"I looked at it this morning, after the opening, and the market was steady. But now—in a few minutes, Rock, Seven Rivers has gone up ten points, and it is still soaring. Ninety and a quarter! And I'm short fifty thousand shares! I've got to—"

He walked over to the stand and took down his hat. His voice was still low, but he could not hide the agitation in his face.

"I'll be back shortly, Rock. Wait for me, will you?"

He left the office at that, and Rockley, who had been silent, endeavoring to follow what was occurring, stood still, wondering. Although he knew little of financial matters, he grasped the fact that fifty thousand shares of stock his father had sold had been diverted, never reaching the broker for whom they were intended.

On the Exchange the broker, thinking the delivery had merely been delayed in the usual Saturday rush to get out of the

office, had sold it all. His father must produce the stock.

And the stock that had been worth about eighty dollars a share earlier this morning, was now, by some strange legerdemain, worth ninety dollars. In other words, the fifty thousand shares of stock had increased in value half a million dollars.

Rock walked over to the ticker. There it was, coming out from under the little wheel, the printed symbol of Seven Rivers—and the price opposite was 94 $\frac{3}{4}$ ! It had increased almost three-quarters of a million now—and Spencer Sutherland was liable for it!

"I wish I could help, somehow," Rockley muttered, feeling in his ignorance of financial affairs somehow like a boy confronted by a man's difficulties.

He waited in the empty office, with the ticker buzzing busily in its corner. The stricken look on Spencer Sutherland's face had not come there for nothing—there were depths to this thing that he could not look into.

He moved restlessly over to the window, and looked over the bay. Down that bay the Fredonian had gone Saturday afternoon, almost two days before, carrying with her a few bits of printed paper on which much—how much he did not know—depended in his father's life. And now she was—

Rock ceased to meditate and began to think. "Let's see—how far out would she be? She isn't a fast boat. Be generous. Give her a speed of twenty knots—that would be four hundred and eighty miles a day—say five hundred. Why, she isn't a thousand miles out now. Ridiculous! Two days to go a thousand miles! Why, I could do that easily in ten hours."

He walked rapidly over to his father's desk, drew a sheet of paper toward him, and calculated busily.

"If he wants those shares by to-morrow he can have them," he announced, all his old dogmatic certitude in his voice. Then the thought of those thousand miles of trackless ocean, smooth or tempestuous, and of the winds, favoring or threatening, rose in his mind—a mind no longer academic, now, but schooled by the hard lessons of practicality. And he thought, too, of motor failure, and of human exhaustion, and he hesitated. Then he clenched his jaws.

"At least, I'll make a damn hard fight



to get them here if it will help him out of this trouble," he amended soberly. "But will to-morrow be soon enough? I'll have to wait and ask him."

It was a long wait. Before Sutherland returned to his office the ticker had clicked off the sale of Seven Rivers common all the way up to 101 $\frac{1}{8}$ . There it stood when he returned, his face grim, and older than when he had left that room. He crossed first to the ticker, read the tape in silence, and then addressed his son.

"I'm in a neat little trap, Rock, and I don't see my way out just now. My own Seven Rivers stock is pledged in another deal, and Jeff Murthoe is fixed so he can't help me either. And the loan crowd have nothing like fifty thousand shares—I can't borrow it anywhere. It looks as if I'd have to go into the market and buy it myself—at a million straight loss at the least.

"And getting that million in cash now means withdrawing from another deal at a loss I can't even estimate now. This came at the worst time in the world, for me, Rock. It—it may mean going into the hands of receivers to straighten things out."

"When must you have the stock?" Rock demanded. In that crisis he found no words to express his sympathy, to comfort this old man he had neglected.

"Under the rules of the Exchange, Ruylen must deliver it by two fifteen to-morrow. If I don't get it to him in time—well, it's failure for them and disgrace for all of us. I was trying too hard to make a killing in something else that would furnish additional funds for the transcontinental."

He sank down into his chair, and his head drooped wearily on his chest. "They've spread a merger story all over the Street," he muttered. "That's what caused this jump in the stock. I've denied it, of course, but the market still holds firm. There's somebody behind this, Rock. And whoever he is, he's got with him the whole gang of fellows who've been burned while monkeying with Seven Rivers."

Rock crossed over to his father's chair, and laid a hand uncertainly upon Spencer Sutherland's shoulder.

"Father, I've never been of any use, but I think that now I may be able to help. Unless things go very wrong I should be able to get that stock to you in time."

Sutherland looked up, puzzled. Then,

in a flash, he realized what the words meant. He got to his feet, and his dejection vanished.

"You mean that you would chase the Fredonian halfway across the Atlantic in some sort of plane, and—I couldn't permit it, Rock. It's too dangerous."

He held out his hand to the younger man, and then mumbled in some confusion:

"It's sporting of you, Rock. I'd—I'd almost say I was glad this had happened, only it means too much to other people."

"Doing this for you means more to me than—than—I've got to do it, father," Rockley insisted gently. "Don't you see? You've got to let me do this—for my own good."

Spencer Sutherland turned back to his chair.

"Go ahead, then, boy," he said. "The old man's beaten—through. Let's see what the next generation can do about it."

Rock instantly picked up the telephone, and gave the number of Soundview. While he waited the connection, he spoke briskly to his father:

"Will you handle the radio communication end of it? Just confirm the fact that the stock is aboard the Fredonian, and let them know a flying boat is coming after it. Then make sure they have gasoline aboard—high test, if possible—and telephone me the results as soon as possible at—Hello! Soundview? Sutherland. Find Mr. Penturn for me, please."

Spencer Sutherland, energized by the vigor and decisive words of his son, reached for a radio blank in his desk and wrote rapidly, while Rock impatiently held the wire.

"Hello, Jim," he said, when he at last heard Penturn's unhurried voice. "Shoot the amphibian to the foot of Wall Street—East River, to take me back to Soundview right away. Please fly it yourself."

"But before you start, get the mechanics on the job of installing spare tanks for fourteen hours' straight flight in the two-motored flying boat. Yes! And get that radio direction finder mounted, too. Mike Rice knows how to do it. I'm going to chase the Fredonian. Tell you about it later. Hurry!"

He put up the receiver, and whirled around suddenly. The big figure of Jefferson Murthoe stood on the soft carpet just inside the door. Neither father nor

son had observed his noiseless entry. His usually placid, good-humored face was alert.

"Chase the Fredonian," he repeated. "Sorry, Spencer, I just came in to talk to you about the situation, and I couldn't help hearing what Rock said."

Spencer Sutherland laid down his pen. He nodded proudly. "Yes, Jeff. Rock's going after the Fredonian, and I have a feeling, Jeff, that he's going to bring back that stock in time to make delivery."

"Well! Well!" said Jefferson Murthoe. "That's—fine—fine, but—" His gaze roved over the upper bay, and the barest trace of a frown gathered on his brow.

"I'll keep in touch with you by telephone until we start, father," said Rockley, reaching for his hat. "Excuse me, Mr. Murthoe. Naturally I'm busy. Have to dash down to the Weather Bureau now."

"Go ahead, my boy, go ahead!" boomed Murthoe with sudden heartiness, and he thumped Rock hard upon the back. "Go after it and get that stock back! We'll show 'em! And I'm going to telephone that son of mine right now that if he doesn't do everything he can to help you I'm coming out to show him he isn't too old for a hiding yet!"

Rockley bolted out of the office. Murthoe followed him closely, turning in at his own. There was something feline in his movements as he walked noiselessly across the floor and stretched out a hand for the telephone.

## XVI

DORIS EARLSTON returned to Soundview Field that morning several hours after Rock had left for New York. Doris had had a sleepless night—a most unusual and sobering experience in her healthy young life—and she had decided that she could not leave Rock in the dark regarding the real nature of that scene in his office.

It was irritating that Rock was not at the field to receive her confidence, but it was also something of a relief.

Rock was not the same young man who had gazed with glassy and disinterested eyes upon everything outside the realm of his scientific researches.

Doris realized that, and she knew, too, that talking to Rock would no longer be as easy and unembarrassing a thing as whispering secrets to a pet stone image. Rock was quite a human being these days.

Nevertheless, Doris was determined that he should not think she loved Darcy. There was something revolting in the very thought.

Although Rockley was not at Soundview, Darcy was, and at first sight of him, Doris felt a quickening of her pulse.

He came out of his office like a man who has received sudden, rather staggering tidings, and when he saw her he walked up to her quite mechanically. It was plain that he regarded her as his—a girl who was bound to be interested in his affairs and fiercely a partisan of his.

"Rock's going to try to fly out to the Fredonian to get some stock," he announced.

"Stock?" repeated Doris. "What for? Where is the Fredonian? Why is—"

"My father—" Darcy said, and then stopped abruptly. In an instant he had recovered, and went on:

"There's some sort of mess in Wall Street, and if this batch of stock isn't brought back here it means trouble—maybe even bankruptcy for old Sutherland. If he does get it back—" He broke off again, and Doris, watching him keenly, mentally decided that that alternative was something that seriously affected Darcy himself. This idea was confirmed when young Murthoe added:

"Of course he hasn't a chance in the world of making it. The Fredonian's halfway across the ocean. But he'll try it."

"Yes, Rock will try it," Doris thought. "And I think you will try to prevent him from making it. Your odious, smirking father has told you to. And although I don't know in the least what it's all about, I'm going to watch you all the time. And I'm going to tell Rock to watch you, too."

Together they walked down the path that led from Soundview Field to the huge hangar that housed the flying boats. There all was activity. The largest of all the aircraft that Rockley had designed, the great two-motor seaplane known as the Albatoross, was on the marine railway ready to be run down into the water.

In its hull, which was a reproduction on a large scale of the ordinary broad-beamed, almost flat-bottomed flying boat body, mechanics were very busy hooking together a bewildering system of tanks and copper wires.

They were combining the many containers into a single gasoline system that would

feed fuel under pressure into the tank in the upper wing until the demands of the two powerful motors drained the last one dry. They worked from plans which Rock had drawn months before, when he had sent the Albatross on a hypothetical distance flight. Jake Grimpen was at work too.

In the forward cockpit of the big hull, Mike Rice was working over the even more delicate operation of installing a radio direction finder. All the men were laboring with speed and concentration.

"It's a long job," said Darcy, "and meanwhile the Fredonian's getting farther and farther away at every minute. If you've got any influence with Rock, you'd better advise him not to try it."

"But you don't think he can reach the liner, do you?" Doris asked, her voice low and confidential.

"I don't, but it would mean ruin—well, Doris, frankly, I'm not anxious to have him try it."

Doris caught her breath. But before she could say anything Darcy pointed down the placid Sound.

"There comes the amphibian. Jim Penturn went in her to New York to bring back Rock. She's coming fast."

The amphibian was indeed taking shape and enlarging swiftly. When she reached the cove, Rockley, at the wheel, set her down in the water in a rapid, skillful landing not fifty feet from the hangar. He taxied to the beach and leaped out. Darcy glanced at his watch. It was a quarter of one.

Rock quite failed to see Doris and her escort, for his eyes were intent upon the busy pygmies that swarmed over hull and wings of the great Albatross. The mechanics knew their business—Rock had seen to that with scientific exactitude when he hired them. And now the young engineer had but few brief directions to give as he watched the work, and now and then took a hand in it.

Once assured that the job was going ahead at as fast a rate as could be hoped, Rock left Jim Penturn in charge, and hastened up to his office. Young Murthoe followed him at once, and Doris, a little fearful of the reception her old playmate would give her, came too.

She was not going to leave Darcy's side for a moment until the Albatross had departed or she had been able to warn Rockley about his treacherous business manager.

At his office Rock had plunged into more calculations—calculations which were aided, and sometimes hindered by his consulting the chart and data he had obtained at the Weather Bureau.

"Hello, Darcy," he said, when his business manager entered. Doris, making herself very small, slipped in behind him, and edged over to the files. "You know what we're trying to do, of course. There's just one factor that is worrying me, and that's the weather."

"According to the meteorologists, we should be helped toward the Fredonian by a southwest wind that is blowing gently up the coast and out to sea. How far it extends seaward is largely guesswork, for dope is scarce, and of course winds don't blow by compass course."

He stopped and frowned. "We're going to try, anyhow," he went on. "Jim's volunteered to go with me, and I know I couldn't do it without him. But I've got to have more help on the shore end, Darcy, and that means you."

"Anything I can do," said Darcy, and his voice was so eager that a tremor of excitement was perceptible in it.

"This is what you can do," said Rockley, leaning forward earnestly. "See to it that the amphibian, with a good pilot and a full tank, is standing by all day tomorrow at Montauk Point."

"It is quite possible that we'll be able to make Montauk, but not New York with our gas supply. And we'll land there, anyhow, for the amphibian's faster than the Albatross, and both Jim and I may be too exhausted to hold a wheel by that time."

"Jim knows a little about navigation—he's been a seaplane pilot, you know, and we hope that the radio direction finder and a little luck will help us out of holes. If not—well, we've tried. That's all. Will you have the amphibian ready for us?"

"I will," Darcy agreed. "Don't worry about that part of it; the amphibian will be at Montauk ready to shoot you down the island to New York."

"Fine!" said Rock heartily. "Now get out of here, Darcy, for I have a million things to do—and"—he looked at his wrist watch—"about three-quarters of an hour to do them in."

Darcy left. Doris, standing by the filing case, made a move, and Rock turned and saw her. Slowly he got to his feet, and under the tan these last few weeks had

given him, the blood flowed close to the skin.

"I'm sorry; I didn't see you," he said stiffly. "Can I do anything for you?"

Doris hesitated. This tense, preoccupied man facing her was utterly unknown—a stranger to her. She could not blurt out that she did not love Darcy—that he had misunderstood what he had seen and heard yesterday in the office. Her whole feminine nature revolted against such a bold, shameless confession. She hesitated, and at that instant Mike Rice stuck his head in the door.

"No, nothing at all, Rock," she said, and hurried out with a pile of papers pulled haphazard from the file. But once beyond the door she halted. She *must* at least tell him that Darcy could not be trusted. And then another thought obtruded.

"No, he has enough to worry about now," she thought. "I'll watch Darcy constantly, and if I see any signs of trickery—well, I'll be able to deal with him myself. And I'll watch the Albatross, too."

Relieved, and yet still somehow apprehensive, she went back again to view the superhuman efforts of Jake Grimpen and the mechanics who were getting the Albatross ready for a desperate chance. Jim Penturn, seemingly as lazy and indifferent as ever, lounged on the landing stage.

"Oh, Jim," Doris said, and her voice trembled. "Do be careful and bring him back."

Jim smiled cheerfully. "He's more apt to bring me back, Doris, but I'll do what I can," he said. "He's certainly turning into a heller, isn't he?"

Halfway down the slope to the water's edge Darcy Murthoe stood and looked over the busy, confident workers with a lowering countenance. His fingers twisted nervously. The swift poignant words of Jeff Murthoe over the telephone still reiterated in his ears:

"Stop him! Stop him, no matter what happens! If he gets back here in time with that stock we're sunk—paupers!"

But how? How could he halt that efficient, obedient crew? His eye fell on Grimpen, working with the rest, but working sullenly, with that air of grievance that was habitual. As the pilot looked up, Darcy beckoned imperatively, and retreated among the trees on the bluff.

Grimpen dropped his pipe wrench and

started up the path, as if on the way to the office. Once out of sight of Doris, Penturn, and the preoccupied workers, he swerved in among the trees. Darcy slunk forward to meet him.

Doris, watching the Albatross alertly, saw Mike Rice finish his work on the direction finder in the small navigating cockpit in the bow of the hull. She hastened toward him, as he was about to immerse himself in the work of connecting the fuel tanks, and gripped his arm.

Rice looked up. Doris was an old friend of the chief mechanic, and her face was grave, compelling. He halted instantly.

"Mike," she said swiftly. "You remember the Falcon, and that damaged winch?"

"I'll never forget it, Miss Doris," he said, and his face became grim.

"Nothing like that must happen on this flight, Mike," the girl said. "If—if Darcy Murthoe tries to get near the boat keep him away—by force if necessary."

Rice's countenance mirrored swift astonishment, and then a savage anger.

"You think that ground-grippin' nickel-counter tinkered with the Falcon?" he exclaimed. "Where is he? I'll feed him to a propeller, the—"

"No! No!" the girl protested. "It's just a—a sort of hunch of mine, Mike. I—I don't want to bother Rock or Jim Penturn about it—now. You mustn't let Darcy suspect—unless he tries—"

"All right," growled Mike. "But there's only one thing due to happen to a sneak that fiddles with a plane, and that's—"

He did not finish the sentence, but the girl read his thought.

"We must get them away—and back again, Mike. You watch the Albatross. I'll watch—the man. We can do that much, anyhow."

"Right!" said Mike. "There'll be nothing wrong with this ship." He climbed aboard, and disappeared into the cabin where mechanics were coupling up the tanks. Doris peered after him. At close quarters she watched the swift work progressing. Then, realizing she might be in the way, she went back to stand beside Jim Penturn.

But Jim was no longer on the platform in front of the hangar. Darcy was standing there instead. Doris looked around for the indolent pilot, and discovered that he



was in the amphibian. At that moment the motor of the plane burst into action, and Jim swept out across the bay, and took off swiftly.

## XVII

DORIS watched the plane fade into the west in amazement. Was Jim Penturn deserting them at this critical moment?

Up from the runway where the amphibian had been resting on its landing carriage an instant before, Jake Grimpen was coming. The girl rushed toward him.

"Where has Jim Penturn gone?" she demanded.

Jake Grimpen looked at her with a mask of blankness upon his face. He fingered a pair of pincers as he spoke.

"He's gone to New York on an errand. He didn't tell me what. But he ought to be back within an hour, miss, and it 'll take longer than that to get the big boat in the air."

"Who sent him?"

Grimpen shrugged his shoulders and surveyed her keenly.

"Don't know," he answered. "Murthoe or the boss, I guess. I was just helping him shove off."

Doris, controlling a surge of apprehension, managed to walk without haste to Darcy Murthoe's side. He turned to her with an eager smile.

"Where's Jim Penturn going?" she asked, trying to make her voice casual.

The business manager's smile faded. He looked quickly into her eyes, and then away, across the bay. When he spoke his voice was cool, and somehow remote. Gone was that confidential tone in which he had told he was not anxious to have Rockley make the flight. Her question had aroused his suspicions; put him on his guard.

"Jim?" he said. "I sent him to New York to get a sextant, almanac, and so forth. We've telephoned ahead to have them at the pier when he lands."

Doris was silent. She looked at the amphibian, now a mere speck above the Sound. After all, she thought, New York was no distance at all by air, and Jim certainly could not navigate without a sextant.

"I wish Rock had trusted me to go instead of Jim," she thought. "Poor Jim will have flying enough in the Albatross."

She forced herself to stand there, beside Darcy Murthoe, while the preparations

hummed on around her. That was her post—beside Murthoe—to see that he contemplated no mischief. If only her post had been beside Rockley, to cheer him on, she thought. But that could not be—not after the scene in the office that he had interrupted.

Rock came down the path, and Rice joined him. Together the two men went aboard the Albatross, examining tanks, the copper tubing connecting them, gauges, the sight feed from the gravity tank in the upper wing.

Darcy Murthoe made no attempt to join them. He stood beside her, silent, staring with a faint suggestion of a smile—or was it a sneer?—on his face. Somehow he gave the keenly alert girl the impression of a man awaiting an event.

The work upon the auxiliary tanks of the Albatross came to an end. Mechanics climbed out of the hull, and the gasoline hose was passed in. Slowly the work of gassing the big ship went on, while Rice crouched in the hull, searching diligently for trouble in the gas lines.

At last Mike emerged and nodded to Rockley. The engineer took his place in one of the two control seats, and started the motors. The great five hundred horse power rotaries sputtered and coughed, as cold metal moved reluctantly against cold metal and cold oil, but soon the great power plants heated, and the roar of the exhaust became uniform and confident. Doris listened anxiously for any discordant note.

For fifteen minutes the heavy, metal-tipped propellers spun as if they had been match sticks, and when Rock opened the throttles wide the great wings quivered and shook, and the tremendous cacophony seemed like the throb of a drum within Doris's own head.

But though the girl still watched the test, her gaze was now bent upon the sky to westward—the sky out of which Jim Penturn in the amphibian was due to emerge. And he did not come.

At last Rock shut off the motors, and climbed out of his seat. A mechanic brought him his baggy leather flying suit.

At that instant a telephone shrilled faintly in the hangar behind Doris, and the man she stood beside. Darcy, though he had withstood the diapason of the motors unflinchingly, started at the sound, but did not move to answer it. A mechanic heard it, responded, and shouted for Rockley.

He came and entered the hangar with a quick, impatient step. The mechanics waited silently, their work finished. Jake Grimpen moved casually toward Rice.

Rock Sutherland came out of the hangar, his helmet dangling loosely in inert fingers. His face wore a stricken look. He walked, as if without volition, toward Doris.

"Jim has crashed!" he said. "Crashed in the East River! Motor quit suddenly, and he had to land fast. His wing hooked a car ferry, and in the crack-up he was knocked out. A motor boat picked him up and took him to the hospital. Who gassed that ship?"

"I did," said Rice. "He had enough for four hours."

"He said the motor sputtered and quit as if he was out of fuel," Rock muttered, and the frown on his face deepened.

The chief mech shook his head, and glared suspiciously at Darcy Murthoe. "Not a chance," he asserted. "There was plenty, if the gas line wasn't blocked."

Rockley glanced around with reviving animation. "We must get a sextant in a hurry, and a relief pilot, somehow. Perhaps at Mineola—"

"A sextant?" Jake Grimpen inquired suddenly. "Was that what he went to the city for? I've got a sextant."

Rock surveyed the man intently. Grimpen, despite his moroseness, was a good pilot. "Can you use it? Will you come along?" he asked.

"I will," Grimpen answered. Without meeting Rock's eyes he turned and started hurriedly up the hill toward his quarters.

Ten minutes later Rock and Jake Grimpen, clad alike in flying suits, exchanged last minute words on the platform in front of the hangar. Rockley looked at his watch. Ten minutes of two. He climbed on board, and Jake Grimpen followed him and took his place in the navigating cockpit, forward of the dual control seats.

Rice hesitated on the edge of the hull.

"How about me, sir?" he shouted above the exhaust of the idling motors. "Suppose you have a forced landing—out there?"

"If we land we've lost the race, Mike, for our time's too short to allow for repairs," Rock replied. "We can't spare the gas your weight would replace. Sorry, Mike."

"A mech might save your lives," Mike pleaded.

"A mech might spoil our chances," Rock answered grimly.

Reluctantly Mike climbed down. Rockley turned and signaled to the man who stood at the winch. The cable was slackened, and the great flying boat on its carriage slid into the water. As it floated free Rock opened the throttles slowly. The motors thundered into action again, and the big flying boat moved almost ponderously over the water.

Not until he was well out into the Sound with more than a mile of clear water ahead of him did Rock begin the take-off.

The heavy ship plowed along the water under the urge of her motors as sluggishly as any other heavily laden surface craft. The hull behind Rock was literally jammed with gasoline and oil tanks. The two huge wings, stretching out on either side, seemed helpless, even in their imposing sweep, to lift that tremendous dead weight.

Rockley's gaze was fixed ahead. With his rudder bar he gently turned his craft so that it was absolutely straight in its course into the wind. Slowly the boat gained speed. The forward part of the hull raised a little as the propellers, urged by a thousand horse power, tore at the air. The ship was on her step. But there she stayed, despite the whirring air screws.

"Too much gasoline aboard," Rock muttered, his face set in strained lines. "May have to taxi miles to burn some of it up. But I'll try rocking her first."

With tense forearms he moved the big wheel in front of him back and forth, imparting to the boat a pitching movement. From the navigator's cockpit in front Jake Grimpen watched him with a critical eye; then, in response to a wave from Rock, climbed back, to take weight off the bow.

The rhythm imparted by the sway lifted the nose high into the air, and down on the Sound with increasing emphasis. Water, foaming, poured over the lower wings. The thunder of the motors seemed to increase, blotting out all other sensations in its terrific assault on the ears.

Rock kept at it, although he feared that, under that frightful strain, something—motor, hull, or wing—would give way.

And then, vaguely through the clamor, he felt a bump, and then another. The Albatross had actually left the water for an instant, only to drop back into it again. But her speed was actually increasing as she kept shaking the water from her hull.

A point of land stretching out from the other side of the Sound was rising ahead, but he could not stop now. Another bump, and then—as he braced himself for another—there came none. The Albatross was in the air, with her heavy load of gasoline, on her forlorn hope of overtaking a ship somewhere out on the Atlantic.

Rock uttered a sound of relief, and grinned back at Jake Grimpen's somber face. Then he turned all his attention to the matter of gaining altitude, while the seaplane raced up-wind toward the city. Rock held her straight ahead, while he tried out her ability to climb.

Very slowly she put feet between her and the surface of the water. When Rockley was convinced that she was maneuverable he drew her close to the Westchester side. Then, in a wide swing, with only a slight bank, he brought her around, and headed along the Sound.

Now they were truly off, with the compass card indicating an eastward course. At every minute that passed, the Albatross, as willing now as she had been reluctant on the surface, was flinging two miles or more behind her with the black smoke of her spurting exhaust pipes.

Suddenly, a hundred feet below them, and to the right, the familiar headland that was Soundview Field flashed into sight. Rock, sparing a glance, saw a little group of people in front of the seaplane hangar.

The sight brought him but one thought—Doris. He had not said good-by to her, and he had been very impolite to her there in the office, after Darcy had left. What had she come for? Why had she waited after Darcy, the man she loved, had gone?

Rock felt a dull ache—a sense of the futility of things, that even the stern urgency of this mission could not banish. But, with that power of implacably driving himself on, he set such thoughts aside in the back of his brain, where they could not interfere with action. This flight meant too much to his father and to aviation to consider personal feelings. He didn't count.

Grimpen was busy ahead. The former navy man was scowling over a chart and some tables of figures which he had glued and tacked to the sides of the cockpit. He was making sundry notes with the aid of a stop watch and an aircraft chronometer that had come out of Rock's laboratory.

Rockley, too, made some calculations, with the aid of his watch and his knowl-

edge of the distances between the towns on the North Shore. The air speed indicator in his cockpit now showed one hundred and ten miles an hour, but the southwest wind, favorable, although not directly behind them, was urging the plane along at close to one hundred and thirty miles an hour, he reckoned.

Knowing that in all probability the wind was fresher farther up, Rock essayed to climb, but found that the Albatross was still too heavily burdened with fuel to mount readily. They were not more than five hundred feet above the Sound now, and Rockley reckoned that to force the plane to two thousand feet, or even to one thousand, would cut down her speed too drastically.

Long Island is no great length when one travels down its shore at two miles a minute. Before the novelty of the flight had died away, Rock found himself looking down at the great sweep of Peconic Bay. At that altitude it was dangerous to fly over the land that separated Bay and Sound, but Rock headed across it without hesitation. Danger could not be considered on this flight.

The boat swept above the green waters of the shallow bay and then on over the South Shore, with its broad white band of beach. Now they were over the ocean—that wilderness of water above which they were destined to fly while the sun blazed in the heavens and finally sank behind them and all light died in the sea.

Jake Grimpen, after directing his attention for some moments to the bluffs of Montauk Point, climbed nimbly back into the alternate pilot's seat, and shouted a course in Rock's ear.

"That ought to take us within sight of the Nantucket lightship, and it will be a good check on my reckoning with the chart," he roared. "After that I'll work the hambone"—he indicated the sextant—"and we'll do some real groping."

Rock nodded. Jake relaxed as restfully as he could in the narrow confines of the seat. Slowly the white sand of Montauk dwindled and grayed behind them.

## XVIII

WHEN the Albatross, after climbing slowly into the air, turned and sped past on its mission, the men of Soundview Field watched it in silence. They were all experienced in the flying game, and they

knew what Rock and Grimpen were heading into.

None there but conceded the two a fighting chance. But none felt like cheering at this stage of the venture. It was too much like staying behind in a trench and cheering men who were making an attack. But they had done their part, and done it well, in getting the Albatross in shape. That was some satisfaction.

Darcy Murthoe, staring at the vanishing flying boat, felt a hand laid on his arm, and looked up to see his father.

"I followed him down by train," the elder Murthoe said, and his eyes, too, roved after the seaplane with an intensity betrayed by their narrowness, and by the wrinkled surface of his ordinarily placid face. "Has the fool a chance?"

Darcy laughed confidently. "Not now," he murmured. "Jim Penturn's in a hospital, thanks to Jake Grimpen's skill with a pair of pincers, and Jake is on board—as a relief pilot and navigator."

Their eyes met. "Good boy!" exclaimed Jeff Murthoe.

"And if Rock should surmount that—difficulty, he'll find me waiting for him off Montauk Point to-morrow morning," Darcy went on with a nervous giggle. "Yes, I think I can guarantee Rock won't be back with that stock for delivery before two fifteen to-morrow afternoon."

Murthoe patted his son on the shoulder, and chuckled amiably. "That means that Ruylen or Sutherland must buy fifty thousand shares in the market to-morrow, and we'll be the ones to sell it to them—at our price."

"This will make our little transcontinental pickings look like chicken feed. And I'll get you the pilot for your Montauk trip, Darcy. Ward is still demanding a chance to square things with Rock."

But Darcy was not listening to him. "There's Doris Earlston—the girl I told you about—the one that's going to be Mrs. Murthoe," he said suddenly. "She's looking—was looking—this way. Come over and meet her."

Jefferson Murthoe, concealing under an affable smile the uneasiness that had made him take this trip from the city, followed his son. The calm brown eyes of Miss Earlston surveyed him with undisguised interest as Darcy introduced him.

"I was so worried about Rock that I came down myself," the elder Murthoe ex-

plained. "My friend Sutherland couldn't come—he's moving heaven and earth in the Street just now. But it certainly looks to me as if Rock would shoot across the Atlantic, grab that stock, and be back in plenty of time to help out his father."

His shrewd eyes probed hers in a single rapid glance.

"Personally," said Doris, with a becoming little shrug, "I don't think Rock has even the barest chance to get back here by plane at all. This strikes me as just a reckless risk of life."

Jeff Murthoe looked out across the waters of the bay, and then, with some stealth, at the girl again. Her face was serene, but he was not satisfied. "Let's hope it turns out all right, Miss Earlston," he said. "Rock's an old friend of yours, I believe?"

"A very old friend," replied Doris. "That is why I feel I can speak plainly. But I must be getting home. Darcy's going to let me fly up to Montauk Point with him to-morrow morning, aren't you, Darcy?"

She shot the question, seemingly quite casual, at Darcy with such suddenness that he stammered and gazed at his father as if for direction. And the girl's quick eyes, no longer serene, saw the angry look that flashed across Jefferson Murthoe's face.

"Why—I—I guess so," Darcy replied hesitatingly. His eyes had come back to her face at the same instant that hers had left Murthoe's. And although he understood that his father wanted him to refuse her, the appealing, almost intoxicating gaze of Doris was too much for him. She had never looked at him that way before.

"But—" Jefferson Murthoe began, and then was silent, struggling to smile again.

Darcy hastened to placate his father. "D-don't worry about us, father. We'll get along fine, and I can—look out for Rock, too. That will be all right. Dor—Miss Earlston's presence isn't going to interfere with our helping Rock."

"I'm so glad," said Doris briskly. "I don't think Rock can possibly get there, but it will be fun anyhow. Telephone me to-night about the time you will start, Darcy."

With a brief smile for both, she turned and hurried up the hill. Not until she was well within the shelter of the trees did she pause. Then, quite frankly, she peered back at the men she had left. No one else



was near them, and Murthoe, Sr., was quite obviously showering his disapproval upon Darcy.

"He doesn't like me a bit, and I'm afraid he suspects I'm not such a fool as Darcy thinks me," the girl decided. "But he can only suspect me; I know, now, from the way he acted, that he and Darcy are going to stop Rock in this, too, if they possibly can."

She slowly finished her climb of the slope. "Now that Rock's gone, I'll have to out-think Darcy and his father myself," she murmured. "If he should fail because of my—"

She did not finish the sentence, but stepped into her roadster and drove homeward with knit brow and compressed lips.

Out on the Atlantic, with the shabby old Nantucket Shoals lightship astern, Rock and Grimpen were steadily making mileage. This venture of finding a liner in the midst of the many thousand square miles of the ocean was not so wild as it might seem at first thought. Rock had put that forty-five minutes he spent in his office to good advantage.

From his father, who had succeeded in getting into radio communication with the Fredonian, he had obtained the position of the liner at noon that day, and also the information that the seas about her were calm.

Sutherland, Sr., exerting the great influence he possessed, had been able to assure Rock that every possible assistance would be given him by the captain of the vessel. The commander had been notified of the situation not only by Sutherland, but by the New York offices of the line. He had been requested to arrange that the ship's call be sent out at frequent and regular intervals, during the entire night.

In the operating cockpit of the seaplane, Rock was still at the controls so that Grimpen might continue his work of plotting the course that must be followed to bring the boat up to the Fredonian. It was a delicate task, that, and resembled only in a general way the work of the navigator of a liner.

The Albatross was cutting through the air at six or seven times the speed of the liner. She was influenced, not by the known currents of the ocean, but by the variable and much more rapid air currents that swirled over the sea. That southwest

wind behind them might fail or redouble its force, but the air speed meter would not record it.

The Albatross left no white wake which would reveal her true course. And her altitude above the sea, unlike the altitude of the liner's bridge, was constantly changing, despite the pilot's best efforts to keep her level. That made Grimpen's work with the sextant doubly difficult.

Grimpen was just as eager to reach the Fredonian as Rock. The sulky, treacherous pilot who had put Jim Penturn out of the running at Darcy's command was no fool. He was devoting all his talents to bringing the seaplane alongside the liner.

After that—but with the hundreds of miles between them and the ship, Grimpen wasted no thought on what was to happen after that. Just now, for the sake of his own skin, he must work in most perfect accord with Rock Sutherland.

Of the two, Grimpen was decidedly the busiest. Occasionally he would climb backward, to a cockpit in the rear of the wings, and drop overboard a smoke bomb. Then, as well as he could, he measured the amount of drift the wind imparted to the plane.

Occasionally he would slip into the cockpit beside Rock and offer to take control of the ship. Each time Rockley, hands and feet steady on the wheel and rudder bar, refused.

"We're moving," Grimpen shouted almost exultantly, as he completed his latest calculations. "According to this we're doing better than a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour."

Rock looked at the paper that fluttered in the navigator's tight grasp, and then at his watch. It was twenty minutes of five. They had already made three hundred and thirty odd miles. That was fast flying, considering the weight of fuel they had started with, but they had need of speed—more speed than that, even.

Rock leaned close to the ear-tab of the other man's helmet.

"I want to beat that," he said, his voice strong against the gale. "I'm going to try her at two thousand—may get more wind there."

Grimpen nodded, and glanced at tachometers, and the oil, and engine temperature gauges.

"They're ticking like chronometers," Rock shouted, and shot a glance of pride

at the thundering motors. The two engines were drumming out their ear-numbing chorus without a single discordant note—a tremendous, Wagnerian harmony that meant safety—even life—to the men alone in space over a desert of water.

Rockley pulled back on the wheel, and the great ship climbed obediently higher into the thin blue sky. Her speed slowed somewhat, but when Rock leveled off the Albatross regained her old pace. Grimpen went back to the rear cockpit with his instrument, and dropped another smoke bomb.

Turning, the engineer saw a thin smile on Jake's face, and understood that the flying boat was cleaving the air at greater speed than before. The wind was stronger here. He set the boat climbing again, but no further advantage could be noted, so he returned to the level where the air was denser, determined to lose no possible advantage.

"Every minute we're burning up our load—getting lighter," Rock muttered to himself. "That means less weight to lift, and more speed. We ought to do it if—"

He cast an anxious glance out over the expanse of water beneath. Nowhere was there any sign of disturbance on the surface of the sea. The waves, mere wrinkles at that height, traveled lazily along in even ranks, before the urge of the mild southwest wind.

Not once did Rock see whitecaps rippling gently over the surface, pretty, yet ominous. Conditions were perfect, but conditions were not likely to remain thus while they winged their way over half the width of the vast Atlantic.

And, as if the thought had called up the vision, his next survey of the northern horizon showed him what he had secretly feared—fog.

It lay low over the horizon, raising a misty veil that curtained the world of sky and water. How far away and how high it extended Rock could not then judge, but, after raising a hand to call Grimpen to his side, he swung the ship a few degrees more to the eastward. A heavily laden flying boat is no craft to go blundering through fog banks.

With its limited ceiling it cannot surmount them, and if once the blank whiteness steals away the pilot's sense of equilibrium, there is no hand so strong as to pull the boat out of a tailspin.

"We're losing mileage, but we're saving it too," Grimpen roared in Rock's ear. "There's no wind up there, I reckon. If the fog banks come no farther south we can make it."

Rock nodded. Fog up here near the Newfoundland Banks is not unusual, he realized. However, he neglected the compass to study the constantly changing conditions. The banks of vapor seemed as sharply defined as if they were mountains of rock and earth. Perhaps they cloaked icebergs—Rock knew that fog accompanies the dreaded white menace.

Nevertheless, after making rough estimates of the height of the banks, he descended lower. Anxiously he watched the clouds. Remorselessly they crept southward, as if creeping forward inexorably to mesh the seaplane in their white bewildering folds.

"We can't fly over them," Rock reasoned grimly. "If we have to go into them we're going to go through hugging the water, so I'll have something to steady my eyes on. If we do hit a berg—"

He dismissed the thought. That was merely a danger—not something that could be avoided by thought. It must be faced. He communicated his decision to Grimpen, who received it with a nod.

Then they struck it—thick, steaming clouds that seemed suddenly to rise out of the sea before them. The sun behind them reddened, dimmed, and faded out. Rock pushed forward on the wheel, and the motors speeded up perceptibly as the ship glided downward.

Chill that was not the sharp, healthy cold of thin air struck them. Involuntarily his jaws tightened, as if he was bracing himself for the smashing impact of an iceberg, but his grip on the wheel was steady.

The dark water rose into sight through the tenuous veil in time to permit Rockley to level off. The Albatross swept through the grayness above the ocean surface. The speed of its progress challenged the ghostly gloom that the fog induced, and the roar of the motors dispelled the depressing silence that steals along with fog.

For minutes that seemed like æons the seaplane charged ahead, its propellers ripping the mist into shreds that instantly became whole again. And then, as if a supernatural hand had turned a switch, the sun flashed on, turning the gray suddenly to silver, and the dark water to turquoise.

They were out of the fog bank, and ahead the ocean was clear and smooth.

Grimpen patted his leather-clad helmet, to soak up the perspiration on the brow beneath it, and shook his head with relief. Rock smiled briefly, and then sent the Albatross soaring once more.

Grimpen climbed forward to the navigating cockpit, to begin once again the solving of the ever-changing riddle of position. A danger had been encountered and passed, and both men were vastly encouraged.

### XIX

IF Doris Earlston's previous night had been an uneasy one, her afternoon by comparison made it seem sweet and dreamless. Now that Rock was out of reach, hundreds of miles from shore, and speeding seaward at an ever-quickenning rate, she realized most acutely what a responsibility she had assumed in letting him go without warning him of her suspicions concerning Darcy Murthoe.

She sat bolt upright, her legs curled under her, in her favorite thinking place beside the brook on her father's estate, and considered the matter gravely.

"I don't know whether they'll try to get that stock away from him to-morrow at Montauk, or just delay him somehow so he can't reach New York by two fifteen," she murmured. "I could tell Spencer Sutherland, of course, but why should he believe me?"

"That smirking old father of Darcy's has been his friend and business associate for years, and I know he trusts him implicitly. Would he lose that faith in him just because of what he'd probably call 'a silly girl's suspicion'?"

She decided that he would not. It would be foolish to upset him further now, in what was the crisis of his life. "He wouldn't do a thing," she decided, "and it's action that's going to save Rock now if—when he reaches Montauk Point."

Impulsively she leaped to her feet, consulted her wrist watch, and hastened toward the house. It was almost five, and she must keep in touch with Mr. Sutherland.

She had no difficulty in reaching him at the Seven Rivers Building by telephone.

"This is Doris, Mr. Sutherland," she said. The old railroad president had known the girl since her birth, and despite the strain he was under, he greeted her kindly.

"I know you're frightfully busy and worried, but I must keep in touch with Rock's movements," she said. "Where do you expect to be later, about the time Rock should—will—I mean—reach the Fredonian?"

"I'll be right here in the office, Doris," replied Spencer Sutherland emphatically. "I've arranged to have every scrap of news about the seaplane sent to me here. Already several ships off the coast have reported seeing the seaplane, and when he is sighted by the Fredonian I'll receive word instantly. You may call me up as often as you want, Doris. I—I know you're as interested in that boy as I am. Certainly you've seen more of him than I have."

"Y-yes, I've seen him quite often," the girl answered. "But you mustn't think badly of Rock because he—he has rather neglected you. It isn't selfishness, really; it's just that he has always been absorbed in aviation."

"If you knew how hard he worked, and how badly he often looked from lack of sleep and proper food before he started to earn the twenty-five thousand dollars, you—you wouldn't blame him at all, Mr. Sutherland."

Her voice quivered, and when Spencer Sutherland answered, his was husky.

"I don't blame the boy, Doris; I blame myself. It was I who neglected him, instead of encouraging him. I'm a narrow-minded, crabbed old man, and—Lord! I realize it now when—"

Doris managed to gulp down a sob and force a trill of laughter over the wire. The lonely, worried old father at the other end could not see her tears. Her voice was gay when she spoke:

"Oh, come, Mr. Sutherland, you mustn't be downhearted just when Rock has wakened up and developed into a real man of action—just when he's doing something that's never been done before. Why, I think it's just wonderful! I'm thrilled to the marrow. I know he will come whizzing back to-morrow with lots of time to spare."

"God bless you, Doris," Sutherland replied. "You've cheered me up amazingly. Lost my nerve, I guess. This waiting is damnable, Doris, damnable. But I know he'll win!"

"Good!" the girl applauded happily, and then her voice became grave once more. "But I want you to promise, Mr. Sutherland, that after Rock returns—you'll

listen very seriously to something I have to tell you—something unpleasant, but something that's true, and that you should know."

Sutherland did not reply at once. When he spoke, there was a tinge of wonder in his voice.

"I will," he promised. "There's something decidedly rotten about this thing, and I can't get to the bottom of it. I've been thinking hard, Doris. It's all fog, though, so far. I'll do some more investigating and reasoning to-night, but how—you—"

"Never mind that, now," the girl said soothingly. "What we've got to do first is help to get Rock back to New York safely and in time. You can help by radio, and—well, maybe I'll be able to help a little, too."

That ended the conversation. Doris hung up the receiver with some satisfaction. "I believe I can convince him," she murmured. "But now—I must wait. How I hate it! Oh, if I were only on the Albatross with him!"

Wait she did, with mounting anxiety, and with fears that grew with the darkness.

She forced herself to keep away from the telephone, save at hourly intervals, and each time Spencer Sutherland answered. "No word yet from the Fredonian. No word from any other ship in the North Atlantic steamer track. We must wait, Doris; we must wait."

Far to the eastward darkness came to the two in the seaplane before it came to the watchers on shore. But though the sun was lost in the depths of the ocean behind them, the brave stars came through the dimming blue of the sky, and Grimpen relinquished the wheel to Rock after a two-hour trick, and leveled his sextant with a grunt of satisfaction at Polaris. At nine o'clock he announced their position as almost a thousand miles from their starting point.

"That's traveling, too," he shouted with emphasis. "It means we've maintained a rate better than a hundred and forty miles an hour. That breeze on our tail has chased us half across the ocean. Regular trade wind."

Rock nodded. "Let's hope it will shift before we turn back," he murmured to himself, with some misgivings. He motioned to the other man to lean nearer.

"It's time for me to start my radio work, Grimpen. The Fredonian ought to be within a hundred and fifty miles of us now. That's near enough to start experimenting."

Grimpen took over the controls. Rock, his body stiff from long hours as pilot, stretched until his muscles cracked, as he crept forward to the navigating cockpit. There he snapped on a light that illumined the compartment dimly, and adjusted a pair of earphones to his head.

The direction finder on which they counted upon hearing the Fredonian calling to them across the sea was very similar to the ordinary loop antenna of radio receiving sets. Turned so that its wires pointed in the same plane as the sending station, the signal of the station or ship was heard at the loudest intensity. As the loop was swung away the note of the signal decreased in audibility.

Rock turned the loop so that it pointed toward nose and stern of the boat. Listening very intently, he moved it slightly this way and that.

The earphones were of aviation type, designed to eliminate most of the noise of the motors, but his ears themselves were ringing with that clamor. He crouched patiently in the cockpit to wait for keener hearing to return to him.

Grimpen, at the wheel, kept one eye on the compass and the other ahead, searching the dark floor beneath them for some slight yellow gleam that might mean a ship. There was none, and the stars, despite their brilliance, reflected their silver glitter only feebly from the black water. No moon aided their efforts to alleviate that Stygian gloom.

Not until that moment did Rockley fully comprehend the desperate nature of their venture. They must find the Fredonian. Not only the success of the mission, but their very lives depended upon it, for there was not enough gasoline left in the tanks of the Albatross to carry them to the nearest shore.

Closing his eyes and summoning all his will to the task of listening, he revolved the loop in greater arcs. There was no sound in the earphones but a slight crackle of static.

He tuned to a higher wave length, but still the silence of the ether remained unbroken, and still the thunder of the motors flooded in upon his ears, as if determined



to smother all sound that interfered with their complete domination. He looked back at the dim countenance of Grimpen, and shook his head violently.

The boat charged onward, and Rock realized that they were fast approaching, perhaps passing, the spot at which he had reckoned, from the noon position of the Fredonian, that the vessel would be at this hour. Had he erred? Or had Grimpen's sketchy knowledge of navigation been at fault?

"We'll find her," Rockley said grimly. He again moved the dials of the receiving set. He bent forward suddenly, his face frozen into an attitude of intense concentration. The direction finder had awakened. A sound in his ears cut through the dull roar of the motor exhausts. His hands leaped to the loop, and moved it gently. It pointed forward, but a little to the right of the course they were following.

Rock straightened up again, his face revealing his disappointment. This was not the Fredonian's call, repeated continuously. It was a code message, sent from a continuous wave set, such as liners employ, and by a skilled hand.

"We're not far from some ship; that's certain," Rockley reflected. "But—"

He stopped. The message had ended, and as soon as the operator had signed off there came a splutter of dots and dashes, a silence, and then the same code letters.

"The Fredonian!" Rock exclaimed, and bent as if to assure himself that his ears were not cruelly deceiving him. The call ticked out again. The ship sending the message had been the Fredonian, and now she had resumed her signal.

He gesticulated jubilantly to Grimpen, and in the intermittent glare of the flames from the engines, he caught sight of his companion's lips stretched in a wide smile that revealed his teeth.

With painstaking fingers Rockley turned the loop a bit to the right; then to the left, and finally satisfied himself that he had the instrument pointing almost directly at the boat. He read off the new course on the compass, and clambered back to the operating cockpit to shout it to Grimpen.

"We're close to her, I should judge," he said. "The signals are coming in strong. I'll go back now, and—"

Grimpen clutched his arm; then waved ahead. Rock squinted intently through his goggles. There, beyond the bow, probably

near where the invisible horizon of water and sky lay, was a faint glow. And it was yellow, man-made light, not the bluish twinkle of the stars.

They stared together. Rock slipped into the seat beside Grimpen, and automatically put his feet on the rudder bar.

Grimpen turned to him quickly; his hands on the wheel shook suddenly. His eyes were goggled, so Rock could see nothing of them, but he sensed a certain change, an undefined hostility in Grimpen's air.

"Are you taking control from me?" Grimpen demanded harshly.

Rock made a movement to relinquish the handling of the craft to Grimpen, but paused. Those shaking hands and that sudden sharp question indicated to him that the other pilot must be suffering from nerves—that the strain of navigating the boat had told on him much more than the strain of piloting had told on Rockley. It would not do now to have Grimpen crack up the ship in landing.

"Yes!" he replied emphatically. "I want you to save yourself as much as possible. I'm handling her now."

With an angry gesture Grimpen let go of his wheel.

As Rock gazed ahead at the dim incandescence the light grew, taking on a movement back and forth across the sky.

"That's her searchlight!" Rock exclaimed.

Grimpen did not answer.

"Halfway! The easiest half, but halfway!"

But Grimpen had nothing to say. He sat motionless, and his face was sullen and defiant. Rock wondered why the man had wanted so much to land the seaplane. Did he think Rockley doubted his ability?

Back in New York, before the window that overlooked the bay, Spencer Sutherland stood at this moment gazing out at the lights of the nocturnal shipping, without seeing them. He had refused offers of company.

In that long ordeal the skin of his face seemed to have loosened, and to have lost its fresh color. His hands, clasped behind his back, gripped and ungripped until he became aware of what he was doing.

With a growl he forced them to motionless repose, but not for long. He turned from the window to pace the floor, with short quick steps.

The telephone rang. He leaped for it convulsively.

"Yes—yes!" he shouted. "What is it?"

The man in the radio office at the other end of the wire was quick to answer. He knew all about that risky venture. "It's come, Mr. Sutherland. 'Seaplane motors heard to westward. Our searchlights casting vertical rays. Signal continuous. More later. Fredonian.'"

With complete lack of dignity Spencer Sutherland emitted a loud, joyous whoop. "Thanks—thanks!" he exclaimed, and then he signaled the operator, and gave Doris's number.

And thus, as message followed message from the Fredonian, Sutherland and Doris Earlston learned what went on in the darkness that night some eleven hundred and fifty miles at sea.

## XX

THE meeting of the big liner and the swift flying boat in the black of mid-Atlantic was a strange scene. The plane, with its double tail of flame flaring behind it, shot out of the sky astern, and circled the slowing liner. Then it headed into the steady wind that had so speeded it from the American coast.

Rock, at the controls, throttled down, and brought the big aircraft as close as he dared to the starboard side of the liner, that he might take advantage of the lane of light cast on the water by the Fredonian's lowered searchlight.

With infinite caution he brought the ship close to the surface. As her speed slackened to less than fifty miles an hour, her broad bottom sent the crest of a swell flying into spray. The boat glided on, to touch another and another wave, before it finally settled onto the sea.

With vast relief Rock noted that the ocean, while not as placid as it had seemed from the air that afternoon, was nevertheless in a mild mood. The regular surge did not threaten to tear the cloth from the long wings, the Albatross's vulnerable spot, nor did the crests rise up high enough to attack the hull.

Rockley gave a grunt of relief, pulled his helmet from his head, and half rose from his seat to indulge in a long stretch.

"We landed easy enough, Jake; we ought to be able to get off again without too much risk of a crack-up," he said.

"How much gas have we left?" Jake Grimpen inquired rather gruffly. "That wind will be dead ahead all the way back."

"I've been doing some wondering about that too," Rock answered. Taking a flash light from a pocket beside his seat, he opened the panel leading to the gas tanks in the hull, and started to crawl in. Then, suddenly, he stopped.

It would be better to check up on the gas later, after he had taxied closer to the liner. He was down on the ocean a quarter of a mile from the ship now, and they might be lowering the boat any moment.

He straightened up again, and turned toward the seat where he had left Grimpen. To his surprise he could not make out the form of the pilot in the faint light of the Fredonian's distant searchlight.

"Jake—" he began, and then suddenly he raised the flash light and sent its beam back, under the wings of the ship.

Jake Grimpen was kneeling on the decked-over hull, his sullen face for once alight with a grin—an evil grin. The rays of the flash light, as brilliant and as sudden as the flare of lightning, revealed him completely.

He was bent over the wind-driven gasoline pump that forced the fuel from the tanks in the hull up to the gravity tank in the upper wing. The same pair of pincers that had that day put Jim Penturn's life in jeopardy were clutched in his hand, and he had almost twisted off one of the blades of the tiny windmill.

He turned like a darting snake as the revealing flash of light fell upon his work. For an instant both men were motionless, staring with startled eyes at each other. Then Rock, with an incoherent cry, dropped the flash and leaped toward the treacherous pilot.

Jake Grimpen raised the pincers and struck out blindly, but Rockley's arms were already on him. In a fury of grief Rock shook the other man until his teeth rattled, smothering his feeble attempts at defense. Then he braced himself and dragged the other man forward.

The pincers fell out of Grimpen's hand. For an instant he scrambled to his feet, and sought desperately for a grip on Rock's throat. Then the engineer's attack, with clenched fists battering his foe in a righteous rage, seemed to take all the fight out of him. He crashed down on his back, and slid toward the water.

Rock flung himself on the man, panting, aching for a struggle to the finish with this traitor. But Grimpen lay motionless under him, arms outstretched. His attitude of surrender stayed Rock's hands. You cannot fight with a man who lies supine beneath you.

"You—hound!" Rockley cried. "What—what were you doing?"

Grimpen gasped; then essayed a jeering laugh. "You can't carry enough gas to get you back against this wind," he asserted. "I—I was just touching up that pump so you'd realize the futility of trying."

The open admission dissipated Rock's blind rage. He paused, not relaxing his pressure on the man beneath him, and tried to think calmly. This courageous, clever navigator of his had turned on him at the very moment when success became a possibility. What did that mean?

"You lie!" he said slowly. "You don't know how much gas we've used."

"We're going to Europe on the Fredonian, you and I," Grimpen murmured mockingly. "This little flight is going to be a one-way trip for both of us, and I'm afraid you'll have to leave the Albatross here for the waves to play with."

Rock heard the words but dimly. Was this defeat? He glanced over the side and saw the Fredonian, with turbines moving dead slow ahead, turning from her course to afford the seaplane a lee. Must he quit now, because Grimpen did? Suddenly he laughed hoarsely.

"You've made it hard for both of us, Grimpen," he said. "Hard, and maybe a bit more dangerous, but you weren't quick enough to put that pump out of commission entirely."

"I'm going aboard the Fredonian," Grimpen declared. "You're welcome to try to get back alone, if you want to. But when that blade breaks off—"

Rock did not answer. Keeping his weight on Grimpen's chest, he reached over and stripped the leather safety belt from one of the control seats. He started to bind the belt about Grimpen's hands.

The man struggled instantly. He stopped when Rock's fingers—no longer the fingers of a sedentary office worker—closed on his throat. Rockley strapped him up securely, using the other belt for his feet.

"What are you doing?" Grimpen demanded, suddenly apprehensive.

"We're going back," Rock replied

through his teeth. "And if that wind pump doesn't keep the tank full, you'll pump gas—or drink sea water."

"No!" shrieked Grimpen. "You—"

But Rock was gagging him with his own helmet, and his cries, feeble against the steady exhaust of the idling motors, stopped suddenly. Rock opened the slide and dragged him into the hull. In the corner farthest from the opening he made him fast.

Then, suddenly weary, he climbed into the pilot's seat and taxied toward the liner. The gleam of hope that had come with the sight of the Fredonian had vanished, leaving his spirit in blacker gloom than his body. But he had no thought of giving up while a chance remained.

Rock brought the seaplane slowly over the restless water into the lee of the liner. He knew that no one on board could possibly have discerned the struggle.

The white, brilliantly illumined decks of the ship were lined with shouting passengers. The animation of the scene cheered him, after so many hours of darkening sea and sky.

A cutter, laden with drums of gasoline, and commanded by a small brisk figure in dark uniform, was already in the water on the ship's starboard quarter. The men in it gave way strongly as the falls were released.

The boat came easily through the water across the hundred feet that Rock had kept between the fragile wings of his machine and the iron skin of the Fredonian. It drew close to the hull, and Rock caught and made fast the rope that was tossed by the bowman.

The officer in the stern clambered on board. He stared curiously at the leather-clad figure that confronted him with eyes blinking in the glare of the searchlight, and face white and drawn.

"Have you that packet?" demanded Rock. The mate nodded.

"You did it, by Peter, but the betting was strong against you on board," he said. "Man, d'you know the size of this ocean and the chances you were running? How could you figure on a smooth sea if you did get to us?"

Rock's lips widened in a slow smile. "We've been doing some gambling, too. If your men will up-end those tanks on the edge of the hull—have you a length of hose?"

He hastened to make the connections, taking care that only he entered the gasoline compartment of the Albatross.

"Where's the other fellow?" asked the talkative mate, as he finally produced from his tunic a sealed and taped envelope. Rock took it and stowed it carefully in the inner pocket of his flying suit.

"Sleeping," he replied curtly. "This is the only time he can take a doze till we sight Long Island again."

Aided by the steady illumination of the searchlight, the big drums were soon gurgling their contents into the empty tanks of the plane. The liner officer stared as barrel after barrel was poured into the intricate system of tanks and leads in the Albatross.

"Sizable craft," he muttered. "Look here; we've dug out by radio some weather reports from the ships astern of us. Not much change ahead, apparently, but if I were you I wouldn't fool around in that thing over the sea any longer than you have to."

"Thanks," said Rock. "I won't."

He dived into the hull again. Not all the tanks had been emptied, thanks to the following wind. Rock was confronted now with the delicate task of taking on no more fuel than the ship could lift off the ocean swells, and at the same time loading enough to buck the wind to the coast. At last he gave the word to stop.

"If that doesn't take us to Montauk, we're beaten," he murmured.

"Wish you luck," said the officer, as he clambered back into the cutter. "You need it—and deserve it. Give way, men!"

The liner's boat drew away. Rock glanced at the illuminated dial of his watch. It was 10.45 P.M., New York time. And at 2.15 P.M. to-morrow, the stock in his pocket must be delivered to the brokers who had bought it. He slipped into his seat, and put his hand on the throttle.

"Long Island's a bigger target to aim at than the Fredonian, but I've got a much longer flight ahead of me, and a treacherous sneak to watch instead of a flying partner to rely on," he thought.

From the Fredonian came three long blasts of farewell as the Albatross, dwarfed by the bulk of the liner, taxied into the wind. The searchlights traced a lane of light to windward.

But Rock did not open the throttle full. Perhaps four hundred yards from the liner

he reduced the speed of the motors to idling, and left his seat. Finding his flash light, he opened the slide, and crawled among the gas tanks to where Jake Grimpen lay bound. For a minute he surveyed his captive attentively.

To him Grimpen was a good deal of a mystery. That he was a good pilot, a clever navigator, and a man of courage in the air he knew. And yet he was a treacherous rascal, and in his encounter with Rock, who was hardly his physical equal, he had put up no sort of a fight.

Though he faced the perils of the air with no indication of cowardice, he had no relish for physical combat. Yet this in itself was not unusual. Every man, no matter how brave, has his particular and not always logical fears. Rock knew more than one pilot who was not at home in a fast-moving automobile. Could he use this fear of Grimpen's to his own advantage? Certainly he must try.

"Grimpen, the Fredonian's gone on her way," he said curtly. "I'm turning you loose now. You'll have plenty of chances to crash this ship and kill us both. Go ahead; I can't prevent that. I can stand dying just as well as you can."

"Remember that I'm captain of this ship, and if you don't obey orders I'm going to manhandle you. I ought to dress you down right now, but you may be useful."

The black eyes of the bound pilot glared sullenly up at him, but Rock paid no attention to them. He was busy undoing the belts that tethered Grimpen.

"Go forward and set a course," he commanded sternly, as he freed the pilot. "And never forget there's nothing but a snorting good thrashing in it for you if you don't do the best you can to make Montauk. Go!"

Grimpen snarled a reply through his chafed lips. Rubbing his arms, he slunk forward, to the navigator's cockpit. Rock went to the controls. He moved briskly, confidently, as if he had not the least doubt that Grimpen would obey orders.

The searchlights of the Fredonian were still turned astern, but their light was dim now. Rockley opened the throttle. The seaplane surged gamely ahead, laboring up the swells and slipping down the other side; then reluctantly splashing from crest to crest.

The feel of the wheel and the strength



of the wind on Rock's cheeks were of more help to him than his straining eyes in this risky attempt to take off from the pulsing, black surface of the sea.

The wind, he realized, had increased. But although it augured ill for him, it was helpful in getting off the water. The invisible force of it under the dim-seen wings lifted the plunging, leaping seaplane suddenly into the air. Almost instantly the rays of the searchlight began fading rapidly from dimness to nothingness.

Rock looked ahead and vaguely distinguished Grimpen's figure against the glow of the small electric bulb of the navigating cockpit. Grimpen was looking astern through his instrument, measuring the drift of the plane by the vanishing light of the liner's searchlights. In the blackness Rockley smiled grimly.

Once more the Albatross was alone on the ocean. But now the friendly wind that had wafted her on her way had turned bitter and hostile—like Grimpen. No longer did the heavily laden seaplane thrust distance behind her at better than two miles a minute. And there stretched ahead of her more than a thousand miles of water.

Rock gripped the wheel with one hand, and with the other fumbled for a sandwich. He took a bite, and cast an eye on the compass.

"Montauk Point's there somewhere, and Soundview, and—and dad—and Doris," he whispered to himself. "And I've got to get there—but—oh, Doris! I wish you were waiting for me—instead of—"

He closed his eyes involuntarily, as that moment when he had seen her in Darcy's arms came before him. Then he shook his head and tightened his jaw. With steady hands that kept the Albatross only a few feet above the reaching tops of the swells he flew westward into the night.

### XXI

HAD Rock only known it, Doris Earlston was waiting for him, with a heart that in turn ached with fear and beat with hopeful vigor. After the excitement and cheer of his arrival at the Fredonian's side had come a brief message that the transfer of stock and petrol had been completed, and that the plane had taken to the air and disappeared once more. Without comment the captain of the Fredonian had added that the wind was west southwest and increasing in intensity.

Doris, perhaps more than Rock's father, realized what that last statement meant. She knew, from her hours of flying instruction at Soundview Field, that a wind of thirty miles an hour means just thirty miles an hour less speed, if it is on the nose. And from the swiftness with which Rock and Grimpen had overtaken the liner, she knew that a favorable wind had helped them. But now—

Time after time she slipped out of bed and peered through the window into the gloom of the stately trees that surrounded the Earlston home to see if the wind was rising. This was foolish, she knew. Time after time she forced herself back into bed again.

But always she tossed and worried over the same thought—that she had failed to warn Rock of Darcy's treachery. And Rockley—if he were not down on the Atlantic in trouble—would be winging confidently to Montauk, expecting to be met there by a faithful friend.

Instead he would discover—too late—a malignant enemy. And how could her mere presence there prevent them from acting? Darcy's father was in the deep game, and she feared him greatly. That it was a desperate and utterly unscrupulous conspiracy she knew; what had happened to Jim Pen-  
turn proved that.

At last she felt that she could no longer stand the strain of inactivity. She must do something. And she must not act alone; for she was now acutely aware of her own weakness. But who could she rely upon. Suddenly she thought of Mike Rice—rugged, loyal, dependable. With him as an ally she might beat them yet.

She dressed rapidly, and stole downstairs and back to the garage. It was still quite dark. Making as little noise as possible, she turned on the light, located her car, and started it.

Until she was some distance down the driveway she drove without headlights; then switched them on. She sent the car speeding over the familiar road leading to Soundview. At that hour it seemed changed and unreal. The night wind thrashed in the trees, and black shadows wavered ahead of her on the road. The glare of the headlight dispelled them, and the car swiftly hummed on.

A quarter of a mile from the field she turned into a dirt road, drew up by the side, and left the car. Then, hurrying on

light feet, she continued her way to the flying field.

In the little group of buildings beside the level expanse of the field there was only one light—in Darcy Murthoe's office. Cautiously she crept up to it, and from a distance of twenty feet she peered in.

Illumined by the solitary overhead bowl of white radiance, as if on a flood-lighted stage, four men sat around the telephone, waiting. Doris's heart thumped as she saw who they were. The two Murthoes sat side by side, Darcy smoking a cigarette; his father chewing a cigar.

Opposite them, sober-faced and weary, was Mike Rice, staring at the telephone. And leaning his chair against the wall was a man she instantly recognized as Ward—the man who had attempted to swindle Rock out of a thousand dollars at the order of the Murthoes.

Ward had shaved his mustache, and was clad in flying clothes. For an instant she had a chilling suspicion of Rice. Was he, too, in the game? Then she realized that Mike had been at Mineola on the day that Ward had made his brief appearance at Soundview.

And as she watched, she had another indication that he was not in the confidence of the Murthoes. Ward, seeing the chief mechanic's eyes on the telephone, surreptitiously attracted the attention of Darcy and his father, and pointed to the door.

Jefferson Murthoe rose at once, and Darcy and Ward, too, got to their feet. Mike, aroused from his thoughts, glanced up, but made no attempt to accompany them as they left the office.

Doris shrank back into the scanty shelter of a bush as the three men filed out. Now was the time to reach Mike, she realized, but instead of eagerly waiting for the men to disappear, she watched them intently. Dimly she made out that they were following the path that led down to the seaplane hangar on the shore of the bay.

On impulse she followed. There was little likelihood of discovery in that blackness, unless she betrayed her presence by a sound. She felt she must know what they intended to do at the seaplane hangar, which now, since the destruction of the amphibian and the departure of the Albatross, held only one seaplane, a powerful three-passenger biplane.

But the men were not bound for the

hangar. Doris barely saved herself from discovery when the three swerved unexpectedly from the path, and came to a halt among the trees on the slope to the left.

She stopped, wondering if by any chance they had seen her. Darcy's voice, low, but clearly distinguishable in the stillness, reassured her. On hands and knees she crept nearer.

"We can talk here," he said. "This is where I gave Grimpen his orders to take Penturn's place." He chuckled.

Grimpen was in the plot! Grimpen, Rock's partner on the flight! Doris's heart sank; a tremor of fear chilled her.

"We'd better be quick or that mech will begin to wonder why we wanted to see the seaplane before dawn," Ward's gruff voice suggested.

"Oh, he's glued to the telepho—" Darcy began to explain, but his father interrupted brusquely.

"Here's the situation, Ward. We must meet the Albatross off Montauk, if Grimpen fails and the flying boat gets that far, and take that stock from Sutherland. You're a practical pilot, and—ah—a strategist. How do we do it?"

"I've been thinking—most of the damn night," Ward answered. "From what I saw of that fellow he won't give the stuff to you. That means force. If you try to pull any rough stuff within sight of Montauk it's a hundred to one there'll be witnesses—and though you may get away with the stock, there'd be trouble roaring later."

"Let them howl—after we've prevented delivery," Darcy muttered.

"There are jails in this country, son," Jefferson Murthoe rebuked him curtly.

"Listen," Ward urged, "here's what we'll do. If Grimpen's quit the ship at the Fredonian, Sutherland will be alone, and about exhausted. We meet him off Montauk just out of sight of land.

"He'll come down in a hurry when he sees his own seaplane meeting him. We go aboard—crack him on the head—a good hard crack—get the stock, and sink the Albatross."

"Just how hard a crack do you mean?" old Murthoe demanded in his cold, steady voice.

Ward hesitated. "We don't have to kill him," he said, "though I wouldn't cry any if we did. Didn't he nearly kill me in that 'chute stunt?"

"All we've got to do is lay him cold for

a few days—concussion. No witnesses. Plenty of time for us to tell how he crashed the ship making a landing, and how we rescued him from the sinking boat. Hero stuff."

He paused impressively. "All right," he went on. "Here's the big point. Out there we stall around awhile. Then we carry the sleeping pilot and the stock to New York."

"We fly like blazes down the Sound—and miss delivery by about two minutes. Who's going to believe a fellow who's flown all night and been cracked in a crash when he wakes up days late and reels off a yarn about his best friends attacking him?"

"Ward, you're a genius," Jeff Murthoe murmured approvingly.

"Just give me a chance to square things with that—" Ward growled; but Doris waited no longer; she turned and stumbled up the hill again. She had thought to overhear some scheme to delay Rock by disabling a plane or motor, and she had heard them coolly plotting his death or serious injury! Once beyond their hearing she ran with frantic haste back to the office, and burst in.

Rice, pacing the floor, looked up to see the girl fling herself imploringly at him.

"Mike! They're going to meet Rock off Montauk—and maybe kill him!" she gasped. "I heard! We must steal the seaplane—have them arrested—do something at once! And Grimpen's in it, too; he—he—"

The chief mechanic recovered from his surprise.

"Whisht! Let's get out o' here," he whispered, and put a strong arm around the overwrought girl. He hustled her through the open door, closed it carefully, and led her around behind the back of the office.

"Where are the blaggards, do ye know?" he asked huskily.

"They're over in the grove still," the girl said, with a sob. "We've got to stop them. Poor Rock—Grimpen may have wrecked the plane or killed him already."

"Killing's too risky for that sulky pup," Mike declared. "I'll back the boss against him any day. 'Tis this end the trouble's likely to come from. That father o' Darcy's—he's smooth an' oily as nitroglycerin."

Doris was fast recovering her composure.

"I think he is the most dangerous," she agreed. "I'm horribly afraid of him. Do

you think we can steal the seaplane and go to warn Rock in it? Will you trust me to fly it? My own isn't fast and powerful, like it, but I'm sure I can manage it."

"Sure I'll trust ye," the chief mechanic said without hesitation. "Little enough to risk, with Rock himself flyin' half the ocean. An' I've seen ye fly as fine as a test pilot."

"We had better try to get the plane now, then," Doris decided, cheered by the thought of making an immediate move against Rock's enemies. "It's getting light already."

"Come with me," Mike said, and turning, he pursued a devious course among the underbrush behind the hangars of the land planes. By this roundabout way they reached the beach. Stealthily they made their way along to where the big seaplane hangar loomed against the faintly lightening sky. No sound came to startle them as they crept up the steps to the platform and over to the hangar.

"They haven't been here—the doors are closed," Mike muttered. "And a fine, delicate job we have ahead of us, too."

With painstaking caution he slipped his fingers into the crack between the rolling doors, and slowly pushed them apart. As the door slid gently along on its overhead rollers, the hangar became a huge sounding box, reflecting and intensifying the rumble of the big door. In the stillness of dawn the noise was startling.

Rice smothered an expletive. Doris was already tugging at the other door, and it, too, added volume to the sound. They rushed in, to see the plane dimly, as it stood on the carriage of the marine railway which would slide it into the water.

"She's all set for flying," Mike panted, as he kicked the blocks from under the wheels of the carriage and gave it a shove. "If we can just get her motor started before—"

The thud of running feet coming down the path from the office sounded in their ears, and the next instant a black figure, dimly seen in the early light, rounded the corner of the hangar not thirty feet from them. Doris, pushing at the seaplane, saw two spurts of flame leap suddenly from the darkness, and her ears ached with the thunder of the reports. The man was firing at them haphazard.

Without an instant's hesitation Rice leaped toward the girl, seized her arm, and

jumped with her off the edge of the platform.

"Run!" he exhorted, as they dropped to the sand. The stamp of feet on the platform warned of reinforcements. He pulled her in close to the side of the platform, and they ran, almost beneath it, up the slope toward the trees.

"Did you get him?" they heard Jefferson Murthoe ask curtly.

"Don't know—two of them," the man with the gun shouted.

"Run!" Mike repeated, as they reached the underbrush. Their ears told them that Ward had jumped from the platform.

"Come back here, Ward!" Murthoe commanded. "Let them go. We can't afford to—"

The crashing of their feet among the bushes and the distance they had put between them and the hangar prevented them from hearing the rest. Rice was leading the way diagonally up the slope among the trees. Before they reached the top he stopped. Panting for breath they listened intently. There was no sound of pursuit.

"It was Ward who shot at us," Doris murmured.

"He's terrible handy with a gun," Mike growled, feeling his left arm gingerly. "That first bullet more'n took skin off my elbow."

"Mike!" Doris exclaimed. "Are you—"

"Nothin' but a token for remembrance," the veteran mechanic replied gruffly. "Which I will, Miss Doris. It shows plain they're stoppin' at nothin'. Good! 'Tis a simpler game to play."

"My flying boat is our only chance, then," Doris said. "You—you don't think it would do any good to notify the police, do you?"

"I do not," asserted Mike emphatically. "This is a personal matter, an' should be settled as such, without annoyin' the police. But—"

"My car is parked in the old road," Doris said.

"I'll join ye there, immediate," Mike replied. "But first I want to get out o' me bungalow a forty-four I keep for the dissemination of lead an' trouble, myself. Listen!"

From the water's edge the roar of a motor rose, menacing and urgent, to their startled ears.

"Too late to use the gun now, but may-

be 'twill be handy off Montauk," Mike growled, and raced away.

Doris was not kept waiting long in her car. Mike, puffing hard, jumped into the seat beside her not three minutes later. But by that time the noise of the seaplane told her that it was out in the bay, taxiing on the water toward the Sound.

"He's a pilot—that fellow Ward," Rice admitted reluctantly, as the car gained speed. "He was quick enough with his gun, but he's warmin' the motor thorough before taking off. I was hopin' he'd try to hop off when she was cold, and fly her clean through a yacht!"

"We can't hope to catch up with them in my flying boat," Doris said despairingly. "Dad wouldn't let me have a fast one."

"'Twould have been better for us if I'd put a match to the dope on her wings," Mike moaned, as he listened to the steady staccato of the motor. "But the thought o' destroyin' a fine ship didn't come to me—not being a cutthroat by trade."

But her companion's depression seemed to brace Doris for what was ahead.

"Never mind, Mike," she said. "We can still help Rock, I hope, unless—"

"Unless the devil protects his own this day," Rice finished grimly.

## XXII

IN the thundering Albatross Jake Grimpen was at the wheel. His face was lined with the marks of fatigue, which concealed all expression.

Rock Sutherland lay sprawled in the navigating cockpit, red eyes wide open, gray lips compressed, shivering in his heavy leather flying suit. He had borne the brunt of the piloting in the hours past, and he had been compelled to watch not only the ship, but his companion.

Through the black night and into the gray morning the Albatross had fought the wind. Just once, for a hundred miles or so, a slant of air from the south had caught the ship on the beam, and she had sped faster toward the distant coast. But then it had hauled into the southwest again, and now, steady as a trade wind, remorseless as time, it opposed the Albatross's flight.

The sun that had sunk into the water behind them on the previous day, now was coming up behind them again, and preparing to outspeed them across the gulf of waters. The red glare of the exhaust was turned pink; the stars had vanished.



The Albatross was boring her way along at an altitude of perhaps ten feet—clinging as close to the surface of the rising sea as safety would permit. For above, the wind blew stronger by ten or twenty weary miles an hour—enough to defeat Rock's purpose.

But Rock was not thinking, at that instant, of his mission. The face of Doris danced ahead of the big flying boat—as elusive as the land they had sought for so many grueling hours. His red-rimmed eyes saw her as plainly as they saw anything else.

Rockley was too far gone in exhaustion of body and mind to consider keenly the peculiarities of the situation, or to probe Grimpen's motive in attempting to defeat the flight. Treachery it was, but whether it was treachery springing from cowardice, from exhaustion, or from some more sinister source he could not attempt to reason out then.

His mind, concentrated on driving Grimpen and himself, wavered from it only in the matter of Doris Earlstoun, the girl he had loved without knowing it—the girl who was now gone—gone to young Murthoe.

Rock turned his head suddenly, with such an expression on his face that Jake Grimpen, steering mechanically, started violently, and in haste consulted the compass to assure himself that he had not wandered from the course.

The man's agitation recalled Rock abruptly to his own duty. He glanced at his wrist watch. It was after six. That meant that it was time to take the wheel again.

What Grimpen had feared to do in darkness and mid-ocean he might venture in daylight, nearer the coast. A slight forward thrust of the wheel was all that was needed to put the Albatross on the water at a speed that would rip the bottom out of her.

Wearily Rockley crawled back and slipped into the seat beside Jake Grimpen. He took control, and as Grimpen lifted hands and feet from wheel and rudder bar, he motioned forward, toward the cockpit he had quit. Up there in the bow Grimpen could do no harm—if he himself could hold out. And hold out he would.

He eyed the compass and noted the needle of the air speed meter. The ship was still doing one hundred and ten miles an hour, but how much of that was neutralized by the head wind he could not judge. Her motors, whose tumult had become as

much a part of the universe as sun, sky, and ocean, still turned the flickering propellers faithfully.

Time dragged on, and every minute took its toll. In Rock's weary brain the flying boat became an accursed thing, doomed to hang suspended there between eternities of sky and water, never moving forward toward the land that lay below the horizon.

The wind whistled through wires and struts; the motors blustered their confidence, but still the blue above and the blue below were unchanging. Only the hands of the watch upon his wrist moved, and they crept slowly to seven o'clock.

Jake Grimpen turned reluctantly; his eyes questions. Rock shook his head; Grimpen was through with the controls of the ship. Henceforth he was a passenger.

As the sun climbed higher behind, it seemed to Rockley that there never had been any other life than this one of flying over an endless ocean. There never would be any other. Soundview Field, his blue prints, the twenty-five thousand dollars that had once haunted his days, the reason for this mission, even Doris—all these seemed figments, impalpable as dream things.

Over across the edge of the rimless sea Spencer Sutherland, as haggard and spent as his son, reached out a hand for the telephone on his desk. An instant later he gave a hoarse cry of joy.

"Two hundred east of Nantucket, you said?" he questioned. "Thanks—I—That's well in the steamer track, isn't it? Thanks. I— At this rate—if their fuel holds out—they might make Montauk by noon."

He hung up the receiver and sat still, staring fixedly at the huge armchair that so often held the bulky figure of Jefferson Murthoe. It was empty now. And the joy upon his face vanished, as his thoughts moved in another direction.

"If I only knew!" he murmured, his eyes still questioning the big chair. "I may be guilty of the basest treachery in doubting him, but—"

The long night had brought questions to the mind of Spencer Sutherland. He had heard nothing from Jefferson Murthoe since the previous evening, and that silence, combined with his own suspicions and deductions, worried him.

Murthoe had never left him before in a

crucial moment. And Ruylen, the broker, had been outspoken in his statement that his keen investigation had revealed that Murthoe was closely though clandestinely connected with men whom Spencer Sutherland regarded as open enemies. Ruylen was not the man to make wild surmises.

Sutherland picked up the telephone again, and called Soundview Field. A mechanic answered the call. He could tell Rock's father little. Darcy Murthoe and his father, and a guy he had never seen before—a pilot—had been at the office with Mike Rice when he had gone home last night. Now they were all gone, and the three-seater seaplane had gone, too.

The railroad man called Doris Earlston's home then. This time he raised the butler. Since Mr. Sutherland was an old friend of the family, his professional reticence did not prevent him from saying that Miss Earlston and a mechanical-looking person had left for somewhere early that morning in Miss Earlston's flying boat.

The butler, awakened by the return of Miss Earlston's car shortly after daylight, had dressed hurriedly. He observed that Miss Doris was in a ferment. The butler was distressed about it, for he was not accustomed to such happenings. He made that plain in voice, not in words.

Sutherland hung up the receiver with a furrowed brow. There were deeps to this thing—deeps which held dark secrets. And every one was playing in the game but he. To him was allotted the hard task of waiting, while others decided whether the name of Sutherland was to remain honorable or was to be besmirched and blackened beyond an old man's power to restore it. He must do nothing, while others fought.

But one of those others was his son—a son who was surprisingly practical in a most impractical way—a son of mystery, and perhaps of force. He would know more about Rockley within a few hours.

Spencer Sutherland stood up and restlessly paced the green carpet, feeling very old and very helpless.

### XXIII

OUT over Montauk Point, that derisive finger of shifting sand that Long Island levels so inflexibly at the mighty Atlantic, a small mahogany flying boat with cream-colored wings and a motor of medium power thrashed its way through smooth airs.

At the wheel was Doris. Beside her,

Rice leaned over the side and swept the Point and the green waters around it with a pair of binoculars.

"Not a squint of the blaggards, Miss Doris," the mechanic shouted, lowering the glasses.

The girl at the wheel nodded. Her own eyes moved beyond the sand dunes and the shoal water roundabout, out to the eastward, where the green sea deepened and shaded to blue. Though the day was fine, the ocean not directly below was lightly dusted over by a mist impalpable at sea level, but veil-like at a thousand feet.

This curbed their high vision, bringing a circling ring of grayish obscurity nearer than the natural horizon. Nowhere could the girl detect a sign of the seaplane in which the Murthoes and Ward, their unscrupulous pilot, had left Soundview.

Doris motioned to Mike, and he brought an attentive ear close to her lips.

"They're probably far out there—down on the water," she said. "We'll try to get beyond them—farther out on the ocean—before the sun burns away the haze entirely."

He nodded in approval. The girl turned the wheel with confident hands, whirling the seaplane onto its right wing tip and turning sharply to the southeast. On this course, straight out over the lazy ocean, she flew, while the windstream unceasingly assailed them. The high bluffs of the Point and the tall lighthouse gradually sank lower in the sea behind.

The Atlantic here is a lonely waste. The coast traffic keeps to the Sound, well north of the Point, and the liners and big ships of the trans-ocean trade steam well to seaward. Fishing boats, an occasional bold pleasure craft, and sometimes the rum fleet may be sighted, but on this pleasant morning the ocean held no humans on its gently undulating surface.

Viewing that desolate stretch of salt water, Doris shuddered, though her hands were steady enough on the wheel. Certainly there was space enough to do any vile deed without fear of observation.

"If they're lyin' between Montauk an' Block Island, we'll fox 'em," Mike declared. "For the matter o' that, we can go halfway to Nantuck—"

His voice choked off in his throat, and Doris, who had inclined her head to listen, turned now to read his face.

It was legible enough, and she saw

thereon surprise fading to give way to consternation. Silently he pointed downward, and to the left.

The girl, following his gesture, saw, creeping along far below, and moving almost at right angles to them, the powerful three-seater. Gray of wing and hull, it was still almost merged in the mist, but despite its deceptive slowness, it was rapidly growing larger.

"They've seen us!" Rice shouted. That was plain, the gray craft was obviously bent on intercepting them, and climbed as it pursued.

"Wants to have a look at us," Mike explained, for encouragement. "A fine lot o' good that will do them." But he laid down the binoculars to put a reassuring hand on the automatic bulking large in his coat pocket.

Doris held course, speed, and altitude. Rice, crouching at her side, forbore to give advice. He was a mechanic, and mechanics do not tell pilots what to do in the air.

The gray plane, at their altitude, shot by not twenty yards to their left. Then it banked around and flew on the level beside them. The clamor of the two motors blended. Not six feet separated the wing tips.

Doris and Mike stared across the airy gulf at the triumphant face of Ward, in the pilot's cockpit in the bow, and then at the less readable countenances of Jefferson Murthoe and his son, sitting side by side behind.

The elder Murthoe bent toward them and shook his head in grave, dignified admonition, and his mouth framed words incomprehensible to them. He motioned imperatively toward Montauk, and then they both saw his lips move in a plain order: "Go back!"

Doris shook her head and turned away. Rice glared on at the Murthoes and at Ward, the man who had grazed him with a bullet.

The elder Murthoe leaned forward and nodded to Ward. Grinning again, the pilot opened his throttle slightly. The big gray plane edged nearer. Its stronger wing drew close to the cream-colored pinion of the mahogany boat.

The girl right-ruddered automatically. Then, realizing that Ward's movement had been a threat; that he was trying to turn her from her course, she dived a hundred feet and flew on.

Ward shot down after her, almost at

once. His heavy gray hull almost grazed the top wing of the smaller plane. Doris was compelled to dive again.

The gray boat cut around the other, and again drew level.

"How about lettin' them race a little lead?" Mike inquired, his savage eyes still on the other machine. Murthoe was waving them back again, and his appearance was distinctly less benevolent.

"No!" said Doris decidedly. "We aren't here to fight, Mike. We're here to help Rock. I'm going back, since they want me to so badly."

"What!" burst out Rice. With outraged eyes he watched her wheel around toward Long Island. Doris's face was serene.

"An experienced pilot can beat a girl—an amateur—at this game," she explained tranquilly. "I don't want to be forced down. They could put the boat out of commission, then."

"Maybe—but—" Mike expostulated hotly, his voice roaring above the shout of the motor. "Damn all women!" he added, but privately. "Who'd 'a' thought it of her, though?"

Helplessly he sat in his seat, with his hands clenched, while Montauk became plainer ahead. Behind, the big gray seaplane, no longer menacing, convoyed them.

"What are ye going to do?" Mike demanded brusquely.

"Since they can beat me at this game, I'm going to play another," Doris said.

"What?" the mechanic asked hopefully.

"I'm going to tell the newspapers."

"Ye don't have to get sarcastic with a guy," Mike said sullenly. He relapsed into miserable silence.

Not until they crossed the sandy neck of Montauk did the other flying boat leave them. Then it headed eastward on a course that would bring it bow on to the returning Albatross.

"Damn all women!" Rice repeated. "No man would 'a' quit cold like that. He'd have taken his beatin'."

Doris marked the direction of the rapidly receding gray boat. Steadily she flew on until the settlement on Fort Pond Bay was under her wings. Then she spiraled swiftly down, landed, and gently beached the boat.

"You guard the boat, Mike, while I hunt a telephone," she said briskly. "I must get the latest report from Mr. Sutherland before I do anything else." She moved away with quick steps.

Mike glanced impotently to eastward. There was no telling how far out on that placid sea the Murthoes would venture to intercept the Albatross. And here they were—beached on the wrong side of Montauk.

"Damn all women," he said again, and this time the sound of his fervent voice was not dimmed by the roar of the motor.

In the office of the New York *Sentinel* the assistant city editor hung up the telephone viciously and looked across at the city editor. That functionary was examining galleys of yesterday's oversight with a mournful countenance, and he continued to do so.

The assistant yawned before he spoke, and held up a few casual notes he had made.

"Another little pipe dream about that mysterious flying boat we're trying to trace," he said. "This time it's a girl with a song and dance about a son of old Sutherland, of the Seven Rivers, flying half the Atlantic after the Fredonian, and getting a bundle of stock from her to bring back to New York to save the old boy from ruin.

"The lady didn't say what movie company she was press-agenting for. Shall I spike it?"

The city editor took one eye from a galley, and let it flick over the city room. The wandering optic paused on an exquisitely clad young gentleman who was fidgeting before a typewriter.

"Send that wiggling kid, Halsey, down to Sutherland's office to get a denial of it. He gives me the jiggles," the city editor said petulantly.

The assistant favored his chief with a condescending smile. The old man had a reputation for believing nothing and doubting nothing, but he was showing his age by wasting even a cub on this sort of tip.

"She said Sutherland had just received a report that the flying boat was sighted on its return trip about two hundred miles from Nantucket," the younger man said with a chuckle. "That ought to give even the mayor's committee of welcome time to get its silk hats polished."

The city editor grunted. Journalism had dented his sense of humor.

Neither man spoke for twenty or thirty minutes. Then the assistant reached out an impatient hand for the telephone again.

"Who? Yes— What?"

The city editor got to his feet, nimble as a cat, at the tone of his assistant's voice. His eye roved the city room again, but this time it fell on a little group of older men who were wasting time with the air of men expert in the wasting of time.

"It's Halsey," said the assistant in a voice almost awed. "Says he got to Sutherland, and— It's true! Sutherland's on his left ear—thought the kid was bringing him news— The story's true!"

The city editor's voice, not loud, but carrying across the city room, split the gathering of reporters into hurrying, alert individuals.

"Dunnell, Brady, Howe, Masterson, O'Glennon!"

A leisurely boy dropped a batch of copy from a news machine on the assistant's desk. One piece attracted his notice.

"Amalgamated's got a bulletin out on it!" he muttered. "It's all over town!" He called loudly into the telephone for Heaven or the operator to get him the art department.

#### XXIV

For one hour by his watch, and twenty-four by his nervous system, Rice fumed beside the silent, empty flying boat, and called down the fires of heaven and hell upon all women, particularly Doris. Then he forgot even his language in eagerness as he saw her returning.

"Rock was sighted two hundred miles east of Nantucket a little more than an hour ago," she soothed him.

Mike consulted his watch for the second time in one minute. "Two hundred east of Nantucket," he muttered. "Say he's a hundred east now—with this wind ag'in' him—he'd be here in two hours—maybe more. Around noon." He turned quickly to Doris. "Might try to get a destroyer or coast guard cutter or somethin' from New London out—"

Doris shook her head, and climbed swiftly aboard the seaplane. "No use, Mike," she said. "They'd tell me to write to Washington if I gave them such a fantastic tale. But—well, Rock has a chance, still, if things turn out right. Shove off!"

With a vigorous effort Mike got the hull off the beach and into deeper water, and then started the motor.

"What 'll we do now?" he asked, surveying her in doubt.

"Detour. We're going to fly west to



Greenport, just above the water, till we are sure the Murthoes can't see us. Then we'll cut across the Sound and creep up the Connecticut and Rhode Island shores. On the other side of Block Island we'll fly seaward again."

Mike nodded, with faintly reviving hope, as the motor roared for the take-off. The body of the mahogany boat plowed heavily through the water, then lifted, slapped at the wave tops, and lunged into the air.

"If only we hadn't wasted so blasted much time!" he muttered, with a glance of perplexity at the smooth-cheeked pilot to whom he had intrusted his own life and the fortunes of his boss. "Darn all women!"

He thrust his hand into his pocket. "But there's still a gun in the game," he consoled himself. "If only we can beat that guy Ward to the rough stuff!"

In the forward cockpit of the Albatross, Jake Grimpen turned head and shoulders suddenly toward the weary man hunched over the wheel. He waved his hand. His harsh mouth framed words. Rock stared stupidly at him; then blinked his grainy eyes and looked beyond, through his blurring goggles.

There was something wrong ahead. The straight line of the horizon was broken. There was something else there besides flat water—a faint something separating sea and sky, like a wedge driven in between them. Suddenly his dulled brain grasped it. Land!

He gripped the wheel tighter. His teeth locked, as his eyes flitted to Grimpen again. What would he do now? He himself must give no sign of weakness—no indication that the situation was changed—no hint that Grimpen's chance to defeat him without risk of death had come. He nodded curtly, as he caught the word framed by Grimpen's pale lips: "Nantucket."

Gently he pulled the wheel toward him. The Albatross was light on her wings, now. Most of her gasoline stretched in a tenuous black vapor, too thin for human eyes to discern, for a thousand miles behind her.

She soared obediently upward. Every foot of altitude made it more certain that the thing in front was no mirage. It was land. Nantucket! Only an hour to Montauk, where help awaited him! He glanced at his watch. Five minutes of eleven. There was still time, if—

Grimpen moved in his seat. Rockley saw out of the corner of his eye that the pilot was looking back at him intently. Grimpen's strange perversity, the thing that had made him a dangerous drawback instead of an aid, was stirring in him again.

"I'll let him know that I'm not afraid of him and his damned treachery," Rock decided, and swung the craft closer to the island. With his eyes challengingly upon Grimpen, he sent the Albatross winging over the shoals that keep the Atlantic liners far beyond sight of the sand dunes that eternally repel the sea.

Grimpen turned forward again, his teeth gnawing at his pasty lips. He sat unmoving, while the Albatross, shouting its unending, thunderous chant, put mile after mile behind her spurting exhaust pipes.

On the surface of the Atlantic, within sight of the chunky outline of Block Island, two flying boats, miles apart, saved gasoline and played a waiting game.

One, the lithe, powerful gray seaplane that held the Murthoes and their unamiable ally, Ward, lay due south of the island; the other, in which Doris and Rice sat tensely, floated more to the southeast.

So much distance separated them that Mike's binoculars left the larger boat a mere blotch on the surface, and raised in them a belief that the other ship had not seen or heard them creeping above the surface to this spot. Certainly the other crew had made no hostile sign.

"It all depends on whether the boss swings nearer the coast toward us, or breezes past away out," Mike said anxiously. "That gray ship—the devil sink it!—is faster than we are by twenty miles, and if Rock shows up nearer them than us—" He shook his head.

Doris said nothing. Her eyes were toward the east.

Mike leveled the glasses, and joined her in her ceaseless scrutiny. He started as her hand touched him in urgent command of silence.

"Listen!" she whispered.

Far off somewhere was a faint rumble. It defied human ears to place it, but it was audible nevertheless. And even as they strained with heads cocked in concentration it became a drumming—as elusive as ever, but with some rhythm to it.

Mike turned again to the gray seaplane. "I'll bet it's that ship gettin' under

way," he muttered, creasing his forehead uneasily. Again he plied his glasses, and exclaimed more emphatically:

"Yes, by—thunder! It is! The boat's moving!"

Doris's eyes sought her wrist watch. Eight minutes of twelve.

"We'll follow, Mike," she said. "It's time he came. They may have sighted him."

The mechanic leaped to the starting crank, and the motor burst into action, sweeping out of consciousness all other sounds. Now they must rely upon sight alone to find the Albatross before Rock's determined enemies reached him.

It was a desperate chance that they were taking, but Doris's watch told her that the time had come for taking chances. A scant two hours and a half remained to get the stock from here, somewhere on the Atlantic, into a broker's office on Wall Street, at the other end of Long Island's great length.

Two thousand miles lay behind Rock's big seaplane, if she still rode the air, but the crucial miles still lay ahead, and confronting him were more implacable foes than miles and minutes.

Doris lifted the ship from the water. Now the smaller boat, though it kept well away, dogged the larger. The gray seaplane was flying southward, straight out upon the desolate and unfurrowed sea.

Was this a trick to lure them out of sight of watchers? Doris did not know, but she notched up her throttle to the limit. If it was a trick, it would succeed. While the Murthoes tried to rid themselves of inconvenient witnesses, she thought fleetingly, Rock might thunder by.

Rice, combing the horizon ahead, gave vent to a sudden cry. He pointed with an unsteady hand.

"There! It's Rock—the Albatross!"

Doris strained her vision, and saw the faint speck that the glasses had brought into view. Beyond all doubt—the Albatross!

It was toward this that the gray seaplane was winging. The girl moved her feet upon the rudder a trifle.

Mike swore under his breath. The other seaplane had not only an advantage of distance—nearer by miles—but also of speed. It was drawing ahead, though the little mahogany boat's motor roared its best.

Doris turned and looked backward, toward the land and the sky above it.

"Too late to look for cops, now," Rice muttered to himself.

Clutching his gun, staring ahead, now with glasses and now with narrowed eyes he writhed in his place while the girl flew her race. Doris flew close to the water and kept her steady eyes fixed on the Albatross. The gray seaplane she disregarded entirely.

Her one purpose was to get within hail of Rock in the shortest possible time. That the other seaplane would reach him first, she knew, but as she could not prevent it, she rigorously dismissed it from mind.

A race in the air is a short race. Soon, with agonized eyes they saw the Albatross swerve into the wind.

"Rock's seen them! He's goin' to land!" Mike groaned.

A lowering of the big seaplane's nose, and a flash of white foam under bottom, confirmed his words. Doris's lips compressed a trifle bleakly, for the gray seaplane was already close to the Albatross. And her own flying boat was still several miles away, and seemed to hover motionless in the air.

Helpless they watched, as the Murthoe plane swung around behind the Albatross, swooped to the surface, and splashed into the water near by. The instant that the boat settled into the water its propeller whirled again, and it moved rapidly to draw in beside the tail of the Albatross.

Panic rose in Doris's breast, as she remembered Ward's cool, ruthless plan—commended so highly by Jefferson Murthoe—to attack Rockley, knock him unconscious, and damage the Albatross, as if she had been crashed in landing. Already black figures were creeping out on the gray wing of the three-seater—climbing toward the Albatross and Rock. But Doris mastered her rising fear.

"They won't dare do that now—with us so near," she whispered to herself. "Some other plan—they won't hurt Rock—they won't—but—old Murthoe will get that stock somehow. Poor Rock! He'll trust them!"

The two flying boats, nestled together on the water, were leaping into greater detail now, as the mahogany boat winged closer. They were covering the last mile.

"Rock's climbin' to the tail—he's goin' aboard the three-seater!" Rice belatedly. He jumped to his feet, heedless of the wind, brandished his revolver, and hurled Celtic curses upon the Murthoes.

Doris gauged speed and distance keenly, her hand upon the throttle. Half a mile to go! Fourteen seconds later, only a quarter of a mile! But the two men on the wing of the Albatross were ready now to shove the gray seaplane astern—and Rock was in her. That meant a faked breakdown—when it was still miles from New York, Doris guessed keenly; a delay that would ruin the Sutherlands—set Rockley's supreme effort at naught.

Mike was too far gone in baffled wrath to realize that the girl was not banking to come into the wind for the landing. As steady as he was frantic, she headed the boat directly toward the nose of the gray seaplane. Then she cut the motor.

The wind was blowing across the wings, not toward them, but Doris dismissed from mind the dangers of a cross-wind landing, with the sight of the gray seaplane drifting clear of the Albatross, to spur her to the attempt.

The mahogany boat, skimming above the gentle swells, slowed perceptibly. Doris, eyes leaping from the gray seaplane to the water beside her own craft, held it in the air an instant longer; then set it down on the wave tops.

There was a spout and flurry of water around them. The cream-colored wings rocked wildly, dipping the tip pontoons deep in the sea. Then the boat, plowing the surface, swept on, and lay across the gray plane's path.

Rice, his revolver ready, leaped to the bow of the boat.

"Come back, Mike!" Doris called at once. But as the boat neared the blunt nose of the other seaplane, the raging mechanic gathered himself up and sprang across the void.

His jump was short. Though one foot actually touched the planking of the gray boat, he slipped down the side and vanished into the water.

An instant later, even as the two craft bumped bows, he came up, swimming vigorously, and laid hold of the mahogany hull. His face was the face of a stricken man, and his hands were empty. His revolver was fathoms down on its way to the bottom.

But Doris paid no heed to him. She had left the wheel and slipped forward just before her flying boat drifted afoul of the other. Her eyes were upon Rock, who was staring unbelievably at her, and she seemed

to fly from the bow of one boat to the other. All the self-control with which she had so rigidly steeled herself in the hours since dawn was gone.

"Rock!" she cried. "Take care! They're enemies! The Murthoes are here to stop you—hurt you!"

"Doris!" he said, and reached out hungry arms to her as she seemed to seek his protection. "Doris!" She dropped her head on his shoulder with a sob wrung from her by her overwrought nerves. Rockley's eyes had been so busy with her that he had no ears for her words. Doris had come to him!

## XXV

As noiseless as a wraith, Ward slipped behind Rock. His hand held his pistol by the butt, and he measured the distance to the head of the dazed young pilot. But Jefferson Murthoe restrained him with a gesture.

"The girl's hysterical, Rock," he said hastily. "Or else—she's here to prevent you from getting to New York in time. We must start!"

The slur on Doris revived Rockley. Her words reëchoed in his clearing mind, and explained this wild landing. Enemies! Doris accused the man he had thought she loved and his father!

"We must put her aboard—" Murthoe went on, but Rock, one arm around Doris's shaking body, silenced him with a quick movement of repulsion that sent the bulky man toppling into a seat. Then, turning on an instinct of warning, he found Ward behind him, with the pistol in his hand.

"That's it!" Rock muttered. "Enemies!" A score of unrelated setbacks were instantaneously explained in his mind as base treachery on the part of Darcy Murthoe and his father. Grimpen's trickery, Penturn's injury, Ward's attempted swindle, the Falcon's jammed windlass, all the products of one malevolent purpose! And now—

"How about it?" Ward demanded harshly of Jefferson Murthoe, out of the corner of his mouth, as he faced the exhausted, dumfounded Rock. "We've got them! Shall I slug him?"

Rice, on the mahogany boat, poised for a leap to the defense of his boss. But it was Doris who made the next move. After her moment of weakness, she had recovered. She raised her head from Rock's

shoulder and laughed weakly at the gunman, and at big Jefferson Murthoe, behind him.

Murthoe had raised his fat body to his feet again. Upon his face was a resolve—a determination to go on with this thing he had plotted. Failure meant not mere disgrace, but poverty—a thing more terrible to this soft Sybarite than fear of prison. A command quivered on his lips.

Rock drew himself up, a wary glance on Ward's weapon. Though his long ordeal had sapped his strength, he was not beaten yet.

But Doris laughed again, and it was not the laughter of hysteria. "Don't be silly," she said faintly to Murthoe, and waved a hand toward the sky. "You can't commit a crime before all these reporters."

Though her words seemed mad, Ward and Murthoe involuntarily raised their heads. At the same time they became conscious that their ears were ringing with a vibrant sound.

Their searching, startled eyes beheld, not four hundred yards away, a tiny yellow biplane spiraling down out of the sun that had hidden it from sight.

Farther away, toward Block Island, two flying boats were racing toward them, neck and neck. From the direction of Montauk Point there came a veritable air fleet, scattered out in the blue, with flying boats clinging to the water, and airplanes at a higher level.

In those tense moments of concentration on things close at hand, the air above, the deserted waters had been peopled, as if by some dark legerdemain.

"What?" snarled Jefferson Murthoe. "What are those?"

"Reporters," said Doris Earlston coolly. "And photographers. They're a little late—but I knew they'd get here—faster than any other help we could seek. The newspapers are aërialized these days, you know."

The yellow biplane swept closer, until it ringed the drifting boats around with roaring movement. In the rear cockpit they caught a glimpse of a little man, standing, busily turning a crank.

"That's probably a newsreel man," Doris commented lightly. "Don't you want to be photographed committing murder, Mr. Ward? Why don't you try to kill Rock, Mr. Murthoe? You look as if you'd like to."

In one vivid moment the glare of pub-

licity had made violence ridiculous—as absurd as leveling an ancient flintlock at a battleship.

A splash, just beside the flying boat hull, attracted their attention. They caught a gleam of blue-black steel; then Ward's automatic sank out of sight.

"We're through," the gunman said, licking his lips and turning a fearful eye upon the charging aircraft. "I haven't done a thing, myself."

Jefferson Murthoe's face went pale with rage and frustration.

"You quitter!" he rasped.

Rock was rubbing a hand against his bewildered forehead.

"Doris, you've saved dad and me—you've—" he began, but the girl laid a gentle finger to his lips.

"Nonsense!" she said with a flush, and glanced again at her watch. "You aren't saved yet by any means. Be practical, Rock!"

Purpose awoke again in Rockley's tired eyes, though they lingered still an instant upon Doris.

The impetus with which the girl's boat had hit the gray seaplane had driven both on into contact with the widespread wing of the Albatross. All three, with motors turning idly, were joined, rising and falling sluggishly with the swell.

At that moment, Darcy Murthoe, who had been watching all this from the Albatross, caught the gray ship's upper plane and swung aboard. His face death white, he held out a hand to Rockley with an attempt at a smile.

"This trickery—I had nothing to do with it, Rock," he declared. "If my father—I thought he—"

He stammered and stopped. Under the eyes of Rocker Sutherland and Doris Earlston he found himself unable to go on with that specious effort to save himself from the wreck of Jefferson Murthoe's plotting. He looked away—and encountered his father's bitter gaze.

Rock's clenched hand smote him on the lips. He gave way, cringing in anticipation of another blow. But Rockley did not strike again where no defense was offered. He advanced, and with his finger indicated the Albatross, where Grimpen watched with sardonic eyes. Darcy scrambled to the wing, and stepped aboard her in a panic.

Sternly Rock confronted his father's old friend, and his despicable follower, Ward.



"Move, you two!" he snapped. Ward obeyed with alacrity.

"You haven't got a thing on me," he reminded Rockley. "I haven't—" He jerked a finger toward Murthoe's big bulk. "That's the lad you ought to square things with."

The veins of Jefferson Murthoe's face grew large and purple with congested blood. "You blasted hound!" he raged. "Have you forgotten that mail car robbery? I'll have you—"

Ward whipped around, his eyes ablaze with fury.

"Over the side!" Rock commanded, and Murthoe retreated before him. "Your worst punishment," he said to his father's trusted associate, "is that you've helped me win. The Albatross is out of fuel. Move!"

Murthoe heaved his unwieldy body to the big flying boat, following his accomplices. Aboard the Albatross the three men drew apart, father, son, and tool, each eying the others with watchful snarl. Fear—the tormenting fear of the crook for the squealer—lurked behind their belligerency. Grimping silently moved away from them to the navigating cockpit forward.

Rice, on the mahogany boat, attracted Rockley's glance.

"Stand by them in that boat, Mike," Rock called to him. "I'll send word afterward what to do with them."

He ran with revived energy along the wing, and shoved the gray seaplane free of the Albatross once more, while Mike did as much for the mahogany boat. Then Rock jumped to the pilot's compartment of the swift three-seater, with a head turned back in passing to Doris. She sat promptly down in one of the passenger's places.

"I'm coming too, Rock!" she called.

"You are," he answered with an emphatic nod, and opened the throttle.

Like a thoroughbred responding to the touch of a familiar hand, the seaplane surged forward, furrowed the water, spurned it, and leaped into the air. Thundering triumph, the boat cleft the breeze, westward bound.

The circling yellow biplane, deserting the Albatross, winged toward the gray plane, as it gathered speed, and the busy little man in the rear cockpit cranked his trained camera, for where there is a woman there is romance—and news.

Bellowing their chagrin, the first of the

fleet of newspaper seaplanes came swooping down, wavered, banked sharply, and pursued Rock and Doris, leaving the Albatross behind. There were unerring noses for news in the cockpit of those two boats, but the gray seaplane was traveling too fast for even news to compete.

Rice, alone in the cockpit of a boat he could not fly, taxied around the Albatross as its two motors coughed, starved, and died.

"I'll stand by them," he muttered, surveying the frustrated quartet with glinting eyes. "And 'twill be damn queer if I can't stir them betrayin' hellions into tearin' each other into little pieces."

## XXVI

SPENCER SUTHERLAND, tramping the floor of his office, had given up hope. No report of the sighting of the Albatross had come from Montauk Point. And now it was almost two o'clock. In fifteen minutes every ticker of the New York Exchange, would cease to print stock quotations to tick off a series of dots, and then the time—two fifteen. And after that he was not only ruined, he was dishonored.

But it was not of that impending fate that Spencer Sutherland was thinking. He was thinking of Rock, his son, down on the ocean somewhere between Nantucket and Montauk, wrecked, perhaps injured or dead, after a gallant attempt to save him at the risk of his life. If only he could feel sure that Rockley was safe, ruin, dishonor, would be easy things to bear.

He sat down at his desk and gazed wearily out of the window. Somebody opened the door of his room. He looked up with swift, eager eyes. It was Jim Penturn—melancholy, with a bandage over his forehead.

"Is there any news?" Mr. Sutherland asked hoarsely.

Jim Penturn shook his head dolorously. "Not that I know of."

He sat down, sympathetically, and shook his head again.

"A tough game, aviation," he said. "Not," he added hastily, as a thought struck him, "that I'm looking for a job in the railroad business. But look what flying did to me—yesterday. And look what it's done to poor Rock—perhaps."

"You think then that—" Mr. Sutherland said slowly.

The door opened again, with a crash.

The noise jarred the railroad man's unstrung nerves unbearably. He whirled around.

Rockley stood in the doorway—or rather a white, trembling, greasy ghost of Rock stood there, with a somewhat disheveled and rose-hued Doris beside him.

"Hello, dad!" said his son. "What shall I do with this?"

Spencer Sutherland gasped, gave an inarticulate cry. Behind Rock, Jack Cameron popped into sight, his delivery wallet in his hand; his hungry eyes on the packet Rockley held.

"Rock—my boy—Rock!" Sutherland gasped, running toward him.

Jack Cameron grabbed the packet. "Delivery, Jack!" Sutherland cried, remembering suddenly all that that packet meant. "Danforth—"

But Jack Cameron, butting his way with his head through an intrusive army of newspaper men, ran a battery of cameras with the treasure clasped to his breast. After him sped half the staff of the Seven Rivers, intent that no mistake should be made this time.

Rock was smiling now as he grasped his

father's shaking hand, and he spoke with a lightness that covered deep emotion:

"Afraid Doris and I will have to charge you twenty-five thousand dollars for this little errand, dad."

"It's going to cost me half my fortune, Rock," Sutherland said with a rather tremulous laugh. "That's transportation. I meant what I said about backing you in air lines—if Doris will agree to keep you practical."

"That's settled!" said Rock with emphatic enthusiasm. Then the first wave of the press flooded into the room. "Great Scott!" His eyes fell upon grinning Jim Penturn, who had retired into a corner.

"Jim!" he said. "You're still hired! Can you fly the gray one—now—to Sound-view?"

"Sure!" said Jim.

So it was that when the gray seaplane again rose from the turgid waters of the East River, it bore Doris and a totally unconscious Rock Sutherland, who dreamed a jumbled, pleasant dream of a wedding trip with Doris over a network of air lines in which the lowest scheduled speed was three miles a minute.

THE END

### THE COW-PUNCHER'S FAREWELL

Oh, my heart is sad an' grievin'  
For a lady I am leavin',  
And I'll never love another, so I think;  
But I'll ride me to th' Border,  
And a keg of mescal order—  
For she's driv' me, oh, she's driv' me plumb to drink!

Oh, she was a darlin' widow,  
And she'd call me her sweet kiddo;  
Then she'd up an' poke her finger in my eye!  
Yes, I had to up an' leave her,  
But I didn't want to grieve her—  
So I said "I'll just go off somewhere an' die!"

Oh, she thought that I was kiddin',  
But I knowed we both was skiddin',  
So I thought I'd better beat it while I could;  
We was slidin', slidin', slidin',  
So I'm ridin', ridin', ridin'—  
An' I'm doin' what I told her that I would!

Oh, it's hell to love an' lose her,  
But somehow I can't excuse her  
For th' way she stuck her finger in my eye;  
So I'm headin' for th' Border,  
An' that mescal I will order—  
An' I'll drink it, drink it, drink it till I die!

Earl Wayland Bowman

# Gift Garments

A TALE OF OLD TICKFALL, WHICH SHOWS ONCE MORE WHAT A MISFORTUNE IT SOMETIMES IS TO HAVE A CONSCIENCE

By E. K. Means

THE Rev. Vinegar Atts sat at the head of the table, in company with the other members of the Big Four of Tickfall. It was their regular morning session. They listened to any news brought to their notice and commented upon it endlessly; they suggested various amusements for the day; they picked up a little scandal about a man who had had a fuss with his wife. To-day, however, none of these things supplied an incentive to action that would entertain them through the long, hot hours before them.

On the opposite side of the Shin Bone Restaurant, where the Big Four had assembled for a late breakfast, sat Mike Mule, the sole other patron of the place at that hour. Mike was engaged in deep meditation upon something of tremendous interest to himself. It was not a love affair, but a matter of matrimony. The two are not inseparable, and there is a difference.

Mike's meditations on the subject of matrimony were based upon monetary considerations. He had found that to borrow a dollar here and a dollar there, day after day, and year after year, finally exhausts one's credit in the town. He had an insuperable aversion to all forms of manual labor, and had acquired the reputation of being the laziest negro in Tickfall. He knew that the word "pay" was not in his vocabulary. He could never pay back all the money he owed for things he had bought on credit, and the money he had borrowed on the mistaken confidence and misplaced friendship of his acquaintances. For Mike somehow had a nice way with him, and no one ever felt exactly like kicking him off the place. When people were not offended by his financial tricks, they were disposed to tolerate him as a neces-

sary nuisance, and to try to believe that he was not a bad sort at all.

"My onliest hope is to marry some nigger woman who has got somepin, an' kin take keer of me like I was raised," Mike was thinking, and at that very moment he had his eye on the woman. "Ef I had some money, I could git me a new suit of clothes, an' could make a better fust impression. Ef I had a rich nigger friend who would lend me de loant of his auto, I could take her out for a ride, an' me an' her could look over dat little plantation she owns. She's a tol'able good-looker, kinder stylish-stout in size; but Lawd, she shore do dress like clothes didn't pester her mind! Mebbe she's like me—got no money to waste on clothes."

The woman he was watching was the waitress in the Shin Bone Restaurant. Boxie Wood was a buxom girl, bubbling over with health and good nature, and she always hummed a tune when she was serving customers at the table. Her musical propensity frequently marred her excellence as a waitress, but this fact never disturbed her, or caused her to drop a note or change the tune. It merely annoyed the patron.

Mike had learned that the girl owned a little farm over on the other side of the Little Moccasin Swamp. She had abandoned the place, and come to town to work, because it was too lonesome living in the cabin alone, with no one to help with the necessary work.

Mike waited until Boxie had served the Big Four. Then, when he smiled at her, she came over to where he was sitting.

"You look kinder sleepy dis mawnin', Boxie," Mike remarked. "Dat nigger man you runs wid must hab stayed powerful late las' night."

"Dar ain't no nigger man pesterin' aroun' me," Boxie replied. "I looks sleepy because I's sick an' tired an' plumb disgusted wid dis job. I craves a waiter job in some nice home, not in a soup house an' hot-cake stan' like dis!"

"How come you don't git you a job in some big house whar white folks lives at?" Mike asked.

"I ain't got no clothes to wear but dese here rags," Boxie explained, glancing down at her dilapidated dress. "Ef I asks fer a job, dey takes one look at me an' knows dat I am a cornfiel' nigger jes' come to town."

"Mebbe I kin git you a nice dress an' gib you a start in dis town," Mike said. "You is a fine-lookin' girl, an' you could make a hit in dis town wid some townified clothes."

"Dar's a place waitin' fer me now dat I knows about," Boxie said. "I could easy git a place nex' week in a powerful nice house ef I could dress up right. Ef you wants to git me a new dress, you git busy an' git it to me quick!"

She turned and walked back toward the kitchen. Mike knew, without need of considering the matter, that he had let himself in for something beyond his power to achieve.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Dis ain't de fust time in my life I'm gone an' went an' ever-spoke myself!"

## II

MIKE looked with speculative eyes at the Big Four, wondering if they would consent to assist him in his matrimonial designs if he solemnly promised to pay them all that he owed them, and had owed them for years, pledging himself to fulfill his promise after he had become well established on his prospective wife's farm. He listened, to learn what the great men were now discussing, in order to determine whether this was a propitious time to approach them with his business proposition.

The table where the Big Four sat was not clean. The flies, attracted by the soft stickiness of the table top, had converted the Big Four into students of entomology.

"Flies is de mos' obstinate vermin dey is," Figger Bush remarked, as he tried to dissuade one from perching on his nose by waving his hand like a thick black swatter in front of his face. "Dey don't know how to desist."

"My wife put a piece of sticky paper on de flo' one day, an' dat night I trod on it wid my bare foot," Pap Curtain contributed. "Dat wus shore persistent fly paper, an' I done a large amount of fancy cussin' befo' I could wipe all de mess off."

"Ef you kill one fly, ten mo' will come to de fun'ral," Skeeter Butts quoted an old saying. "I don't kill flies wid poison, fly paper, or nothin'. I bresh 'em off."

"I figger dar will be flies in heaven," Vinegar Atts, the preacher, remarked. "De Lawd had flies when ole Pharaoh wus livin', an' dey served de Lawd pretty faithful. We's got 'em wid us yit, an' dey still serves de Lawd."

"How you know dey's gwine to heaven when dey die?" Figger Bush wanted to know.

"Because why?" Vinegar answered. "Whenever a fly dies, he turns over on his back an' looks up. He looks whar he's gwine."

"Whut I likes about flies, dey ain't fer prohibition," Skeeter Butts, the former barkeeper, asserted. "In de good ole days you never did see a fly on de water wagon; but gosh, how dey did hang aroun' a wagonload of beer!"

"Times ain't whut dey useter be," Pap Curtain commented sadly, screwing up his yellow face in a grotesque grimace. "Dey's duller an' harder."

"Talking about hard times, niggers," Vinegar Atts remarked, as he pushed his corpulent form back from the table and his round, black, babyish face twisted as if he was tuning up to cry, "I'm havin' po' luck right now."

"Preachers don't b'lieve in luck," Pap Curtain snarled. "Dey puts deir trust in Providence."

"Me an' Providence is gittin' along fine," Vinegar asserted; "but it 'pears like Providence done fergit Sermon an' Song."

"You mean dem two nigger brat twin chillun of yourn?" Skeeter Butts asked, as he rose from the table, adjusted the crease in his trousers, fingered his collar and his tie, and surveyed himself in a mirror, examining with special approbation the part in his hair, which had been made by a razor. "I thought dem brats wus a special providence. Whut ails 'em?"

"Dey's mighty nigh naked," Vinegar said. "De skin is showin' on 'em in so many places dat dey looks like a couple of shiny black beetles."



"Dar's plenty fig trees in dis here country," Figger Bush grinned, as he clawed at his thick, woolly hair, and looked at Vinegar with a face wrinkled with lines of humor. "How come you don't practice yo' Bible an' make 'em some clothes out'n fig leafs?"

"Dem chillun is too hard on reg'lar garments to make 'em wear vegetables," Vinegar responded.

"How come you don't beg some clothes fer yo' pickaninnies?" Skeeter Butts wanted to know. "White folks is got plenty white chillun in dis town whut's about de size of yo' little Sermon an' Song."

"Dat's my trouble," Vinegar lamented. "Dey's wearin' clothes now dat I begged from de white folks, but all kinds of chillun is so hard on clothes dat when dem gyarments gits down to my brats dey ain't nothin' but rags an' holes."

For awhile the four men sat in silent meditation. It was the hottest time in the summer, and in that agricultural country money was then in the making. August cotton was looking up with white eyes to see how things went with the world, and in a little while there would be money for pleasure, money to pay bills, money for travel—possibly a little money to pay the preacher; but for the last few months Vinegar, his wife, and his two small children, with their odd names, had had but one hymn to sing:

Lord, what a wretched land is this  
Which yields us no supply!

"I'm got a new notion, niggers," Skeeter Butts said, breaking the silence. "Le's start a movement to hab Vinegar Atts sонт a mission box."

"Mission box?" Pap Curtain asked. "Whut in de name of mud am dat?"

"Well, suh, I don't know fer certain," replied Skeeter, with an air of perplexity; "but it goes somepin like dis—all my white folks follers attar Revun Sentelle's religion an' calls demselves Episcopologyuns."

"Episcopalians?" suggested Vinegar Atts.

"Yes, suh, dat's whut I said," Skeeter informed him. "Now I wus down at de rectory de yuther day, sонт dar by Sheriff Flournoy wid a arm load of ole clothes. De Revun Sentelle tole me dat he wus gittin' up a mission box of ole clothes to send to some po' missionary preacher. He esplained dat de missionary preacher wus too po' to

buy clothes, an' wus ashamed to go widout 'em, but he warn't too proud to wear old cast-offs."

"Huh!" Pap Curtain grunted. The bearing of Skeeter's remarks was still beyond his comprehension.

"I git you!" Figger Bush barked. "You means fer us to go to de Revun Sentelle an' ax him to git up a mission box fer de Revun Vinegar Atts?"

"Suttinly," Skeeter replied. "You will all see de light doreckly."

"Me an' de Revun Sentelle has been preachin' in dis same town fer twenty-five year," Vinegar murmured. "We's de onliest preachers in Tickfall."

"Shore!" Skeeter exclaimed, growing enthusiastic over his plan. "An' you has been good friends an' feller workers all dem years. He'll git you enough clothes in a box to las' you till Song is sung out an' Sermon is talked out, an' dey sing de benediction an' pernounce de doxology."

Pap Curtain sprang to his feet.

"Come on, niggers!" he said. "We'll leave Vinegar settin' here, an' de rest of us will wait on Revun Sentelle as a cullud cormittee."

Suddenly a great hope flamed in the eyes of Mike Mule. He rose and followed the others out.

### III

"HOLD on, fellers," Mike said, when they stopped just outside of the door to plan their business. "I couldn't he'p hearin' whut Vinegar said. I done been po' an' naked an' distressful all my days, an' I would like to jine in wid you-all an' he'p Vinegar out."

"You mus' be gittin' religion in yo' ole age, Mike," Skeeter said. "I never knowed you to wish nobody well befo'."

"Naw, suh—yes, suh—mebbe so," Mike replied. "I ain't never he'ped nobody, because I ain't never had nothin' to he'p wid. Somehow I ain't never seem to ketch on about no religion; but dis here job, now, gittin' clothes fer chillun whut's ashamed to be saw on de street, I kin onderstan' about dat, fer I done been mighty nigh dat way all my life."

"I move we let Mike Mule go wid us," Pap Curtain said. "We kin take him along like a sample. We kin p'int to Mike an' tell Revun Sentelle dat Vinegar's brats is as ragged an' disrippitable as Mike."

"Shore!" Figger Bush agreed.

So Mike fell in step with them, and the four marched to the rectory.

There was no resident of Tickfall, white or black, whom Dr. Sentelle did not know. The birth of a pickaninny about the color of a ripe blackberry was of as much interest to him as the bursting of a world. He was not interested in things, but in people, and he knew and loved all who dwelt in the village where he had preached for many years. In return, the people of Tickfall loved him to adoration.

The four negroes found him seated in a sway-backed chair on the lawn beside the church, watching the quarrel of a family of blue jays, who danced insultingly around one another, uttering raucous cries and flapping their wings in vituperative gestures. The fine face of the old scholar wore no smile as he watched the row, but his eyes danced with laughter.

The four men walked up quietly, in order not to frighten the birds, and stood silently beside the clergyman while the show was on.

Two jays pounced upon a fat worm at the same time. Contending for the possession of the entire victim, each bird gave a pronounced exhibition of tantrums, vicious temper, and ability to teach swear words to a steamboat mate. The worm finally broke in two. Each jay gulped half, cussed the other for having taken a "hog bite," and flew sulkily away.

"That controversy was conducted without any consideration whatever for the sensations of the worm," Dr. Sentelle remarked in his eloquent, thrilling, flutelike voice.

"Yes, suh, revun," Skeeter laughed. "Dar was a nigger went crazy in Tickfall las' year because he thought he had worms in his head. Dat explains how come jay birds is such crazies."

"Revun Sentelle, is you ever heard dat jay birds belongs to de devil an' spends eve'y Friday in hell?" Pap Curtain asked.

"I've heard that often. It's Ethiopian folklore," Dr. Sentelle replied.

"Naw, suh, dat ain't no fokelow, or nothin' like dat," Pap said. "It's jes' a nigger notion."

"Do you think it is true?" Sentelle asked.

"Boss, I don't know; but I axes you dis—is you ever in yo' whole bawn days saw a jay bird on Friday?"

"I cannot say that I have," Dr. Sentelle smiled. "I am eternally intending to find

out about it the next Friday, but something always comes up to make me forget."

"I'd druther be a bird dan a bug," was Figger Bush's contribution.

"Huh!" Skeeter replied jeeringly. "You is a bird. A buzzard laid you in de hot ashes, an' de devil hatched you out!"

"Sit down, boys!" Dr. Sentelle invited. "Skeeter, I have a box of cigars on my desk in the study. Go in there and bring out the box."

In a little while the cigars were glowing fragrantly, and Pap Curtain leaned back and announced:

"Dese here smokes don't keer ef us four smokes does smoke 'em, bless Gawd! Mos' seegaws I gits tastes like gobbage wropped up in a rag dat's had some kind of medicine fumigate spilled on it."

"Why didn't Vinegar Atts come with you?" Sentelle asked.

"We lef' him out a puppus, Revun Sentelle," Skeeter answered. "In fack, us is a comittee of three, wid Mike Mule kinder on de side, to wait on you in favor of Revun Vinegar Atts."

"What's the trouble?"

"Tain't no real trouble," Skeeter said. "Leastwise, it depends on whut you calls trouble. Me, I consider dat twin nigger babies like Song an' Sermon wus sorer an' sadness ferever; but Vinegar, he argufies dat dey's jes' afflictations of de Lawd to keep him po' an' humble an' down-trod, an' mebbe it will be good fer his soul."

Dr. Sentelle nodded at this, as if he comprehended fully and agreed with the argument. At the same time he was wondering what it was all about, and was waiting for more light.

"De ways of Proverdunce is strange an' histidious," Pap Curtain announced solemnly, nursing the ash upon the end of his cigar, to see how long he could smoke it before it fell.

"Tis kinder funny," Figger Bush cackled. "Now in dis case, Proverdunce looks like it's on bofe sides. It's dis here double-barrel Proverdunce whut gits me. Proverdunce wus on de twinses' side, or dat little Sermont an' dat little Song wouldn't never of been bawn; but dar is another Proverdunce whut wucked agin Vinegar Atts an' his wife. De clear Proverdunce is whar de twinses is bawn, but de deep Proverdunce is de afflictation of Vinegar. It's one Proverdunce set up agin another Proverdunce, an' it 'pears to me like de big bear

is got to eat up de little bear, an' one Proverdunce is got to come it over de yuther Proverdunce in some kind of way. I ain't so clear on dat. I wish I wus!"

Dr. Sentelle gazed solemnly at Figger during the silence of one minute. Then he turned his kindly eyes to Skeeter, and asked:

"Is Figger Bush the colored person you referred to who thought he had maggots in his brain?"

"Naw, suh, he ain't him," Skeeter said; "but Figger, his mind shore do slip de governor's belt sometimes! He talks like he ain't got but a one-cylinder brain an' a smoky spark plug an' his mouth is back-firin'."

"Well, now, let's get our business clearly before us," Dr. Sentelle suggested. "I understand that you three men compose a committee, with Mike Mule on the side. What does Vinegar Atts want?"

"Lawd, ain't dat fine?" Skeeter exclaimed in great admiration. "Revun Sentelle, you done got us on de straight road wid one little speech. Vinegar Atts wants clothes!"

"Clothes for himself?"

"Naw, suh—de twinses needs clothes. Dey's mighty nigh naked, all but," Skeeter said. "Dey's about as naked as Mike Mule, mo' or less, in spots."

"What does Vinegar want me to do about it?" Dr. Sentelle inquired.

"Tain't Vinegar cravin' dis so much as us," Skeeter said. "Of co'se, Vinegar will thank you forever, but he's jes' in a jam. He's got two eight-year-ole twinses, an' no clothes fer 'em, and bad luck."

"I understand!"

"Now, when I wus here recent, revun, you tole me about a mission box of clothes you wus gittin' up fer a po' white preacher; an' we comittee figgered mebbe you'd git up a box of clothes, twin size, fer Vinegar's chillun."

"A suit fer Vinegar an' a dress fer his wife would come in handy, too," Mike Mule suggested.

"I'll be delighted to do that," Dr. Sentelle said cordially. "Let me suggest that you three men keep quiet about this little matter. Day after to-morrow, at latest, I'll see that the box is delivered at Vinegar's house."

"You shore is a noble white man, Revun Sentelle," Skeeter said, as they arose to go. "We thanks you hearty!"

The four men had walked a block down the street when Mike Mule stopped them with an exclamation.

"Hol' on, niggers! I done fergot an' lef' my hat. I drapped it right by Revun Sentelle's chair!"

"I didn't know you had no hat," Skeeter snapped.

"I ain't use to havin' one," Mike said. "Dat's how come I fergot to fetch it away wid me."

"Go on back an' git it," Figger Bush said. "Dat white man don't want no ole ragged nigger hat around him. Us will mosey on, an' you kin ketch up wid us."

This was just what Mike wanted. He hurried back to the lawn, and with many apologies explained that he had returned for his hat. He picked it up and dusted it by slapping it against his knee. Then he said:

"Revun Sentelle, ef you git dat box ready by day atter to-morrer, I'd like to come back and git it an' tote it out to Vinegar Atts. Dat will he'p a little bit, an' it will save you some trouble."

"That suits me," Dr. Sentelle said. "I'll keep the box here until you call for it."

#### IV

ON the day appointed Mike Mule stopped at the rectory and carried away a wooden box. It bore the address of the Rev. Vinegar Atts, and a card written in the fine hand of Dr. Sentelle stating that it was the gift of himself and the people of his parish "to his brother in the ministry."

Within the box there were half a dozen dresses for the daughter of the family, Miss Song Atts, one of the ebony twins; but what delighted the little girl most was a dainty pink parasol. She was not permitted to start out with it that night on dress parade, but she set up a howl and would not be comforted until she was allowed to take it to bed with her.

As for Sermon Atts, there were several suits of clothes in fairly good condition, and his shiny black eyes grew teary with emotions of joy as he recognized the clothes as having been the wearing apparel of some of his little white friends in Tickfall—boys of wealth and social prominence, who, he thought, had sacrificed their best clothes in order that he might be as well dressed as they were. Like all children, his gratitude was deep but inarticulate.

"Dem white boys shore done me noble!" was all that he could say.

When Dr. Sentelle started the word that he wanted anything, the joyous generosity of his people demonstrated their affection for him. His appeal for a mission box for the colored clergyman of the village, whose service to his race had been coextensive and contemporaneous with the doctor's own, had met with the same joyous and eager response. Each in his sphere, the two men had worked faithfully for the community, and their labors were generally appreciated.

When that box left the rectory, it contained a suit of clothes, almost new, for Vinegar Atts, and a dress, almost new, for Maw Atts. Alas, those two garments never reached their destination!

It is our sad duty to record that the mission box did not go directly to the house to which it was addressed. Mike Mule slipped into a thicket on the side of the road, opened the box, and examined its contents. When he repacked it, he entirely forgot to put in the suit and the dress intended for the adult members of the Atts family.

Vinegar, of course, did not know of this unfortunate oversight. His friends had solicited clothes only for the children. These extra garments were a work of supererogation on the part of Dr. Sentelle, and they fell into the hands of a rogue.

The members of the Shoofy Church were proud of their preacher's family when they beheld the shining raiment the next day. They had all heard of the mission box, and they were loud in their expressions of admiration when the recipients of the benefaction appeared.

"Holy Marster!" Pap Curtain exclaimed. "Sermon Atts prances aroun' in his new duds like he was sorry he was bawnd to die!"

"Look at dat little Song Atts wid her pink umbershoot!" Skeeter Butts snickered. "Proud as a monkey wid a tin tail!"

"Dem nigger chillun is whut takes my eye off de tex' an' de subjeck of de Gaws-pill discourse," Figger Bush remarked. "King Sollyman an' all his fawty millyum wives never was rigged up in no outfit like dem two twin chillun!"

The children sat side by side, both dressed in white silk, both barefooted, and oh, how that white did emphasize the black, and how amazingly black they looked! Nevertheless, they were the happiest youngsters in the world. The little girl

hugged her pink parasol to her side, rubbed her dark face against the satiny covering, and was more content with life than she will ever be again this side of the stars.

The church service ended at ten o'clock, and immediately a number of the colored women hastened to the homes of white people in Tickfall to busy themselves in the preparation of the Sunday dinner. "Maw" Atts hurried to the Gaitskill kitchen, for she was a famous cook, and had served for years in that family.

"Keep dem chillun clean an' fotch 'em up to de big house about time dinner's over," she told her husband. "I'll git you-all somepin to eat off'n de table. Us is gwine hab plenty eats, because us is got a houseful of company."

"I'll fetch 'em up," Vinegar assured her; "an' ef dem brats gits a speck of dirt on dem clothes, I'll take enough skin off'n deir carcasses to make Marse Tom Gaitskill a new saddle fer his ridin' hoss!"

## V

WHEN a Southern girl goes on a visit to friends, she goes to stay all summer. She brings her lovely and delectable self, her exquisite clothes, and the summer atmosphere of her warm and genial personality to a big Southern home. She is as gratefully received and as eagerly welcome as food to a starving pilgrim or water to a man dying of thirst in the desert.

Lois Gaitskill, with her eager young face, her brown hair, her brown eyes, her wistful mouth, and a smile that eclipsed the sunshine of the day, sat upon the Gaitskill porch, a visitor to her uncle's home from California. On week days she sat idly in the swing and looked across the far spaces where the cotton grew and the negroes worked, one making about as much progress as the other.

Now Lois had moved her seat from the swing to a comfortable rocking-chair, where she could have the best and farthest view of the road. Down the long hill before her she saw dark-skinned children of the sun tumbling in the sand like bugs. Their shouts came to her across the distance, all harshness drained out as their vocalizations were harmonized by the fluted tree tops. Young colored girls fluttered like flower petals along the road in their gaudy dresses. A soft-moving colored woman with a bright bandanna on her head traveled sedately along the highway in a dig-



nified journey to her home from the meetinghouse. She was patting down the dust with her feet as she crooned to herself about—

"My long white robe dat I bought las' June,  
I'm gwine to git changed, because it fits too soon;  
An' de ole gray hoss dat I use to drive  
I'll hitch him to de chariot in de morn."

An' ole brudder Ben and sister Luce,  
Dey'll telegram de news to brudder 'Bacco Juice.  
Whut a great camp meetin' dar will be dat day,  
When we ride up in de chariot in de morn."

Four dogs came to the top step of the porch and looked at the girl. One of the four was a hound of deep humility and apologetic manner, a sorry son of sorrow, whose voice was a wail of woe. The second was a fox terrier with thumping tail and eager eyes, a son of mischief, with a voice of eternal argument and dispute, and a blatant hypocrisy which revealed itself in an instant readiness to lie down, roll over with his feet in the air, and beseech the adored one who has condescended to notice him to come right over and stand on his head. The third was a Scotch collie, with an air of eternal devotion and perpetual loyalty, and the fourth was a bloodhound, with a face like the countenance of an old, childish man who has seen all the woes of the world, and who is now staring into his own tomb and just tuning up to cry about it.

The four dogs invited Lois to come out and play with them; but her eyes were upon the road.

On the lawn with the dogs was a gentleman of very dusky pigmentation and a wide-toothed smile. His name was Mike Mule. He and his lady love, Boxie Wood, had each acquired a new dress, and each had secured a new job in the Gaitskill home—one as yard boy and general helper, and the other as housemaid. They had begun their work that morning, and both were happy.

Mike glanced with cunning eyes at the "lil missy" sitting on the porch, and muttered to himself:

"Dat little gal is watchin' de big road. Somebody comin'! Ef you plant yo' clover, when de blossoms is full of honey, de bees will find 'em. Sot a pretty gal on a porch in dis town, an' de boys will shore locate her!"

"Mike!" Lois called. "Take those dogs around to the barn and lock them up

for the rest of the day. They're a nuisance!"

"Yas'm. Dem dawgs gits deprived of liberty right now," Mike assured her.

Down at the foot of the hill in Tickfall, Lois detected a cloud of dust upon the highway. She stood up, an exquisite figure of loveliness, stretched herself to her full five feet of height, and smiled. Then she darted through a window into the house, put on some more war paint, and got ready for the fray.

Four automobiles, bringing young men and maidens, came up the driveway at about the same time. The young folks called noisy greetings to the girl who sat upon the porch, and who had elected to lie in bed instead of going to church. This crowd constituted what Maw Atts called the Gaitskills' "houseful of company."

Then certain young men of the party, who had wandered out around the garage and the stables, were heard laughing with a hysteria which approached lunacy. The four dogs had been released from the garage by one of the visitors, who had opened the door without knowing that the animals were locked up for the day. While the canines did not know what the laughter was all about, they joined in the excitement with their contribution of noise—the howl of the hound, the yip of the terrier, the jovial bark of the collie, and the melancholy bellow of the bloodhound.

Lois Gaitskill ran back through the house and peeped through the curtains of the rear window. She came back and reported:

"The men are standing in a ring around a little colored boy, and laughing at him; and the colored boy is so proud and happy, you wouldn't imagine!"

"That's the cook's son," a fluffy-haired girl informed them. "He's about eight years old, and his name is Sermon. He's a darling, and oh, the blackest thing! Just a smutty spot on the world!"

"But what makes him so funny?" another girl wanted to know. "Surely they're not laughing at him because he's black! All colored persons are black."

"Wait!" Lois giggled. "I hear them coming around the house. Wait and see!"

Two white men, each holding one of little Sermon Atts's hands, escorted him around the house and established him upon the lawn, in full view of the girls upon the porch. Then the white men who had

formed the escort of honor—ten of them—stepped back a few paces, holding respectful attitudes, waiting like actors for the audience's applause.

What the girls saw was a perfect infantile type of the Ethiopian race, black and shiny as new tar, bareheaded, barefooted, dressed in a closely fitting suit of white material, and absolutely and visibly swelling with pride and glory.

The girls all applauded and "made migration" over the little colored boy. The show being over, the white men turned away and forgot him, and the delighted little fellow scudded back to the kitchen, to inform Maw Atts that "dem nice white genmens is shore proud of my new clothes!"

While the show was on and the applause was most enthusiastic, Mike Mule peeped around the corner of the house to see what it was all about.

He recognized Sermon's suit, for he had inspected it when he took it out of the mission box while he was hiding in the thicket. The suit that Mike was now wearing had come from the same box; and the thought, the great fear, that his own clothes might attract similar attention, and become a subject of comment, made his hair stand on end. With Maw Atts in the Gaitskill household, Mike did not want anything said about that mission box, or his new suit, or Boxie's new dress, for Maw would certainly mix them all up in a fuss;

and when Maw got to fussing she was some little mixer.

"My Lawd!" he sighed. "I'm gittin' ready to git kotch wid dis new suit of gift garments on me. Dem white men will hang my new suit on a tree limb widout gwine to de trouble of takin' me out'n my pants an' coat!"

With the sleeve of his coat Mike wiped the cold perspiration of abject fear from his forehead. For a few moments he stood in deep meditation. Then:

"I'm gwine leave dis place immediate!" he announced.

Half an hour after that he came out of an old cotton shed near the railroad. He had changed his clothes, and was now the familiar scarecrow form of rags and tatters that Tickfall knew best. He carried a bundle under his arm, and, when he passed the house where the Rev. Vinegar Atts lived, he threw this bundle on the little front porch and ran.

"I done give dem gift garments back!" panted Mike, as he waved a fleeting farewell to Tickfall from the top of a moving freight car.

By sundown he had slipped off the freight train into the crooked streets of New Orleans, and was an undesirable citizen of that historic municipality.

There had never been the least cause for alarm; but conscience makes cowards of us all.

### ACHERON

OH, let me write of Acheron,  
That river out of the black sun,  
Where hearts no longer feel or break,  
Or beat for some tall beauty's sake;  
But where there delicately glide,  
Upon that sedgy riverside,  
Pale, lonely wraiths that once could love  
In the green meadows there above,  
Where the long grasses bend and swing.

There might I meet that darksome king  
Who is the last and fearful friend,  
Who lays his hand on you and smiles,  
And says, "Beloved, 'tis the end!"  
And, oh, the Queen Persephone,  
That sits beside him on his throne,  
He stole by the Ægean Sea,  
A flower 'mid flowers all alone!

*Richard Le Gallienne*

# Just Before the Battle

THE SEA OF MARRIAGE HAS ROCKS OF STRIFE, SAYS THE  
OLD RIME, AND SOMETIMES THE PLEASANT STREAM  
OF COURTSHIP MAY HAVE THEM, TOO

By Elizabeth Jordan

"WHAT I can't understand," Clarice Van Doren was saying, "is why you're takin' the guy so seriously. No girl does that nowadays, after she's twelve years old; and you with a college education, too! Don't pay no attention to him, or, if you must notice him, laugh at him or step on him. Believe me, kid, it's the only way," she added with stern conviction.

She was in Edith Capen's private office as she spoke, seated close to Edith's desk, and observing with wide-eyed wonder the threatened collapse of David Shipman's usually perfectly poised secretary.

Along the Rialto, Miss Capen had the reputation of being a twenty-minute egg—a reputation which Miss Van Doren, proud of having the run of the Shipman theatrical offices, had helped to circulate. The visitor admired Miss Capen, and was under obligations to her. Heretofore Clarice's admiration had been combined with high respect, but to-day it was touched with scorn. This college girl to whom she had looked up, and whom she had inwardly revered—this highly paid private secretary to the great David Shipman—was just like all the rest of them when it came down to cases. She could have her feelings hurt and look red-eyed and pink-nosed and desperate, exactly like eighteen-dollar-a-week Mary Burke at the telephone.

"Of course Dave Shipman is the toughest egg in the business," Clarice went on, as Miss Capen did not speak, "and that's goin' some. His manners are ter'ble, and he breaks contracts like he'd break doughnuts. The way he treats comp'nies at rehearsals is a scandal. As to expectin' him to remember that he owed somethin' to old friends—well, I could give you a lot o'

dope on that, if I wanted to. When that kid was twelve and thirteen, my mother used to give him the hand-outs that kep' him alive; but does he remember it? Not so you'd notice it. He's been stallin' me off a job for two months, when he knows darned well I'm on my uppers. He could 'a' dropped me into that road company he sent out last week, but did he do it? Not him! Gratitude's a word Dave never looked up in the dictionary."

These references to her own wrongs had aroused Miss Van Doren much more than her companion's hardships. She began to feel that something ought to be done about them, quite forgetting her earlier advice to ignore the ingrate.

"You ain't goin' to stay on here after this, are you?" she urgently inquired. "There's other men in town that's got to have secretaries, and that knows how to treat 'em; and a whole lot of 'em would be glad to take you. Any one that's stayed with Dave Shipman a year has won a medal. Ike Einstein would give you a job to-morrow. Why don't you leave Dave flat? It 'd be the big surprise of his life if you did, and believe me, he'd have some job fillin' your place. With the repitition he's got for temper and tantrums, there ain't another girl in the business would take the work. Every one knows he threw a telephone book at Mamie Murray's head only last week and cut her cheek open on the cover of it; and last month—"

"He's ashamed of that," Miss Capen now contributed. It was her first remark in five minutes, and she had filled the interval with vain regrets over having betrayed her state of mind to the sharp eyes of the older girl.

"Did he say he was?"

"No, but I could tell it by his actions. He couldn't bear to look at Mamie."

"So he 'pologized by firing her! I know. It's jest what he'd do."

"No, he didn't fire her. He got her a better job in another office, and it's really a relief to have her gone. Mamie was rather trying, you know—either crying or giggling all the time."

"Be that as it may, he's the limit, Edith Capen, and if you don't want your own head split open some day, when he's in one of his rages, you'll get out of here an' you'll stay out."

"I suppose I ought to." Edith Capen hesitated, her resolution flickering like a candle flame. "He really is getting worse, and his outbreak just before he left the office this afternoon was unpardonable. Think of his shouting to me, before you and Mary Burke, that I was a fool!"

"What's keepin' you here after that?"

"You'll think I *am* a fool."

In her overwrought state it was a relief to Edith to talk to some one, and she remembered that Clarice, despite her free tongue, could be trusted where her friends were concerned. Shipman's secretary had been a friend at court to Miss Van Doren—had slipped her into the private office ahead of other callers, and had seen that her name was at the top of the list of applicants for musical comedy seconds. Yes, Clarice could be trusted, and it *was* nerve relaxing to talk after a year of repression; so Edith went on.

"You'll say I'm a fool," she repeated, "but it's Mr. Shipman himself I'm thinking of. He'd be in an awful hole if I left him—"

"Wouldn't it serve him right, since he can't treat you decent while you're here? The idea of Dave Shipman thinkin' he can insult a girl like you, jest because he's payin' you a salary!"

"I know it would serve him right; but, after all, it wasn't I he was bawling out. He was simply venting on me his rage against some one else. He's like that. Success has spoiled him. He thinks he's a superman, and can do anything he pleases."

"I know," Clarice added. "And the bunch that's helpin' him to think so by kotowing to him every minute makes me sick!"

"Yes, that's what's helped to spoil him. It's 'governor' this and 'governor' that,

and 'what you say goes,' and 'this is one of your inspirations,' and 'no one can help you to think,' till he sees himself as a little god."

"You never heard me flatter him none, did you?" Miss Van Doren darkly inquired.

"No, I never have."

The secretary laughed, and the laugh helped to clear the atmosphere.

Privately Edith had often reflected that Clarice might be the cross that won Shipman his crown. Her manner to him was as rude as his own, and she never lost an opportunity of letting him see that she remembered the days when, as infant citizens of the same block, she and the successful young producer had played together in the gutters of the East Side. Edith knew that Clarice privately admired the way in which her old playmate had risen from those gutters, had attended night school, had worked through two years of college, and without money or influence had fought up to the top in the theatrical world.

His fighting spirit, Edith believed, was now Shipman's big handicap. He could not stop fighting, for he had always fought—with his tongue, his fists, and his brain. He could no longer fight with his fists—at least, not publicly; but he gave full rein to his temper and his tongue. Clarice was the only person who could silence him.

"Don't give me none of your Cherry Street lip," she frequently remarked in the heated interviews between them; and at this Shipman would turn on her a scorching look that usually ended the interview.

"You bet I don't flatter him," she now complacently asserted.

"It's not his temper I mind as much as his air of omniscience and omnipotence," Edith went on. "It's got so that when he's conducting a rehearsal, no one around—company or director—dares to offer him any sort of suggestion. He considers advice as no better than an insult, and he's ready to discharge the person who presumes to offer it."

"Don't I know? Ain't I watched him? It 'd do him a whole lot of good to have some one talk to him once in awhile that could make him wise to himself."

Edith sighed.

"It would," she agreed; "and—well, I'm rather tempted to stay and be the one that does it. Since I don't care how soon I leave, I might be able to give him a little



training. It 'd be a thorn in his side, but it might help him. Something has to be done for him soon, by some one."

Clarice caught her lower lip between her teeth and studied her friend, her eyes brightening as the possibilities of the situation opened to her.

"It 'll be a great stunt, if you don't weaken," she slowly agreed, turning over in her mind the idea that had just come to her.

"I won't weaken, if I decide to try it. He's thirty-four years old, but he's just a horribly spoiled little boy, with no more sense of responsibility for his actions than a spoiled little boy would have. He knows a lot about the show business, but he could learn a lot more if he didn't think he knew it all now. I don't agree with you about laughing at that sort of thing. I don't believe in occasionally stepping on it, either. His case calls for steady work; otherwise he'll be setting up a throne here, ordering a crown for himself, and ending in some sanitarium, with delusions that he's the Deity."

"I c'n give you a glass of water, if you want to moisten your throat," Clarice suggested rather absently.

She was immensely intrigued by the discovery she had made, and she was very sorry for the girl before her. Edith Capen was in for a devil of a time!

Edith laughed again. Her poise was returning with her self-respect. One attack of weakness in a year wasn't a bad record after all.

"I'm not going to orate any more. I'm not going to worry any more, either. I've done my last worrying over Mr. David Shipman; but if there's any way of making him feel ashamed of himself once in awhile, and of cutting into his abysmal self-satisfaction, I'm going to do my best to find it."

"Go to it!" Clarice spoke almost reverently. "Here he comes, so you needn't lose no time. H'lo, Dave!" she remarked airily, as the producer approached; but she rose to leave as she spoke. There were limits even to Miss Van Doren's audacity.

"Hello, Maggie Murphy!" Shipman had discovered that it irritated Clarice to be addressed by her former name in these new surroundings, so he never failed to address her thus. He got his effect, and went on contentedly: "Don't you ever do anything but loaf around these offices?"

In the circumstances it was a cruel speech, and Miss Van Doren whitened with anger.

"Any time you want to keep me out of these offices you know how to do it, Dave Shipman!" she flared. "You c'n do it by keepin' your word to my dyin' mother that I'd never be out of a job; but if she'd known I'd have to crawl on my stomach twice a year to make you keep it, she'd 'a' died before she ast you!"

"Good day, Maggie," said Shipman firmly, and went on into his own office, with a jerk of a thumb toward his secretary, to intimate that he wished to be followed.

Edith nodded a farewell to Clarice, who was swishing angrily toward the door, and, gathering up her notebook and pencil, accompanied her employer.

## II

SHIPMAN's private office was the inside one of his suite of three rooms. Miss Capen's desk was in the second room, connecting with it. The third, a chamber guarded by a robust and hard-faced office boy, was one of the bleakest hunting grounds of the theatrical district. In it, during Mr. Shipman's office hours, and long before these began, from a dozen to thirty anxious-eyed candidates for work daily awaited that gentleman's pleasure. They were a varied crowd, including the beginners who were making good, the novices who were anxious to begin, the established favorites who were rarely kept waiting, and — most tragic figures these — the old-timers who, through advancing age, illness, or dissipation, had ceased to make good.

Two qualities all these classes had in common—pluck and pride; and there was no spot where pluck and pride were more needed than in Shipman's waiting room. The successful young producer was as ruthless as a force of nature. He could not risk failure by miscasting rôles, and he thought he could not waste time by softening his rejections. More than once Miss Capen had witnessed a real tragedy in those offices.

"My God, I wish there was some way to keep that infernal girl out of here!" Shipman grumbled, as he dropped into his desk chair.

"Isn't the way she suggested the best one?" Edith said lightly, as she sat down

beside him and opened her notebook. "A job would keep her away."

Shipman raised his head from the letter he was reading and shot a quick look at her. It was the first comment of the sort she had ever made to him. It implied criticism, and to Shipman criticism was insult.

"I've given her a lot of jobs," he said icily. "I've kept her in jobs for years."

"Yes, and she has always made good in them. She's above the average for chorus work—has a nice voice, dances well—"

"You seem to be interested in Maggie Murphy," Shipman jeered.

"I like her—every one does, for she has one of the biggest hearts in the business; but I'm more interested in the situation. When Napoleon was a poor young man, a certain laundress in Paris washed his clothes free of charge. When he was an emperor, he made her a duchess."

"I've heard that incident," Shipman returned dryly; but he plainly regarded the reference to Napoleon as a tribute to himself, for he went on in a milder tone. "You're thinking of those hand-outs Mrs. Murphy used to give me," he said. "She gave 'em, all right. She did a lot for me. I was starved and frozen most of the time; but perhaps you don't know that I gave her full value for every hand-out. She had no boy, and I was a handy kid. I ran all her errands, did her repairing, and made myself generally useful. When she asked me, before she died, to look after Maggie, she admitted the score was even between us; but I've done it just the same, and the reason Maggie hasn't got a job now is that I'm holding her back for 'The Prince of Jazz' company next month. That 'll be on Broadway for at least a year, and to be on Broadway a year is Maggie's notion of heaven."

"That's splendid, but why don't you tell her about it?"

"Because she's too damned fresh. Now give me those letters I dictated this morning."

Edith laid the mass of correspondence before him. She was interested by his recent revelation, but she was not moved. She was going to leave, probably almost at once. She hoped she could register at least one or two more protests against him as an individual before she went.

She found an immediate opportunity. Shipman looked up from the first letter he

was about to sign, his handsome, smooth-shaven face flushing angrily.

"Look here!" he snapped. "This isn't the way I wrote that letter!"

Edith dropped an eye on the letter.

"No, it isn't," she said cheerfully. "I improved it."

"You *what*?"

"I made it a humane communication from a successful young man to a down-and-out old woman. I told her just what you said, but I worded it in a way that wouldn't hurt her feelings."

He lowered his black head and stared at her in silence. It was his characteristic gesture before the bull-like rush of his temper. She met it calmly, and his own look slightly changed. He spoke, however, as irritably as before.

"Hereafter don't change my dictation. I'm capable of deciding how to write to my correspondents."

"Oh, but you're not, Mr. Shipman—that's just the trouble." Miss Capen spoke with undiminished cheerfulness. "Probably she was leaving to-day, so there wasn't much time left to her. She would make as effective use as she could of what there was. 'Your letters are often horribly cruel. I'm sure there isn't another producer in the field who sends out so many unnecessary heartaches in his correspondence, and makes so many poor souls cringe with humiliation. You not only refuse work to people, but you make them feel that no one wants them. I can't write such letters any more. They haunt me. They've been keeping me awake at night.'"

He stared at her with equal amazement and anger.

"Is this a resignation?"

"I suppose so. Certainly I can't stay on if I haven't the privilege of softening the cruel blows you're directing right and left. I don't so much mind what you say to the young—they can look out for themselves; but this bullying of the old and the helpless—"

"Bullying! What the devil do you mean by that?"

He was furious now, and was working himself up into still greater fury. He hurled the letter on his desk and squared himself for action.

"May I really tell you? I'm so glad, for I meant just what I said. It *is* bullying you're doing to these people. You sit back in your comfortable office and strike

out at them with indifference and rudeness from behind the shelter of your strength and success; and they have to take the blows. What else can they do, poor wretches? They have no way to get back at you, and you know it; so why isn't it bullying?"

"If any one else talked to me this way," he began ominously, "but you—you—" He stopped, and continued in a different tone. "I see! You're simply talking through your bob because I lost my temper this afternoon. Well, I don't see how I can help that. As for those letters, I never meant to be cruel, and I don't believe I have been."

Incredibly, he meant it—she saw that, but she was still more conscious of the amazing revelation he had given her. Apparently, for once in his life, he was open to another's point of view.

"Do you think so? Just let me read your letter to Mrs. Fallows—the one that you dictated and I ventured to change," she said, turning to her notes.

Before he could answer, she read the dictation, coolly and impersonally, from its curt beginning to its end.

"How about it?" she asked, as she laid down the notebook.

"One letter doesn't make a case," he muttered.

He looked so like a sullen and bewildered small boy that her lips twitched, but she ruthlessly continued the lesson.

"One doesn't, but here are more. Listen to the one you wrote to poor old John Adams yesterday."

She read it.

"Did you send that?" Shipman asked.

"No, I didn't. I softened it. I've been modifying half your letters for months, but usually you've read them so hastily that you haven't noticed it. Here's another."

She read several more—they were all very short—and he listened in silence.

"Do you care to go on with to-day's mail?" she asked at last.

"No, I don't, but I've got to. The answers must go out to-night."

He dictated the answers, but she realized that his mind was not wholly on what he was saying. Once or twice he checked himself and omitted or modified a sentence. It was true, then—he had not realized what he had been doing.

At the end of the dictation he whirled his swivel chair to face her more directly.

"Look here!" he said crisply. "You'll put me in the devil of a hole if you leave. If I have to break in another girl while I'm busy with this next production, I'll go crazy, and you know it!"

"I know you make things very hard for yourself," she corroborated.

He flushed again.

"What d'you mean by that?"

"I mean—since you ask me—that things would be much easier for you, and for every one who works for you, if you could learn to exercise a little self-control," she calmly told him, though her nerves were jumping. "Of course, when you rave and rant, you rattle yourself and everybody around you."

He rose.

"Well, I guess that 'll be about all," he said quietly. "You can finish out your week, Miss Capen, and after that I'll try to struggle along without your valuable assistance."

"That will be fine," she heartily agreed.

"If you like, I'll get a new girl in to-morrow and give her a little preliminary training; but do try, for your own sake, not to interrupt it by throwing a chair at her," she lightly added, as she rose.

"I believe you're crazy!" he almost shouted.

"Oh, no—I'm just one human being speaking frankly to another. You must remember that I have merely answered your questions and thrown in a bit of excellent advice as a farewell gift."

She strolled out of the office, leaving him speechless.

### III

THE next morning Shipman glanced around Miss Capen's office as soon as he came in, as if looking for a newcomer. Edith answered his unasked question.

"They've promised some one by this afternoon," she encouraged him; "a girl with fine references and five years of experience."

"I bet she chews gum!" he bitterly predicted, and added in a lower tone, coming close to her desk: "Suppose we forget her? Telephone 'em we don't want her. I've been thinking it over. I can't break in a new secretary now. You—you can change my letters."

"But I'll have to change your manner a little, too," she warned him.

"Oh, well, I'm sorry about yesterday."

Evidently he attributed all these developments to his loss of temper, which seemingly had had her for its object. He was blithely unconscious of other ground for criticism. "I can't understand you—you've been so sensible till now," he unwisely added.

The remark gave her the opening she needed.

"I can't show that kind of 'sense' any longer. If I stay on, may I say anything I please to you? I really can't keep quiet hereafter."

He grinned. She was beginning to amuse him. Besides, for a whole year she had been an ideal secretary.

"Shoot off your opinions if you want to. They won't interest me, but they may relieve you."

But already Edith had discovered that they did interest him. Those hesitations and changes in his dictation had proved it clearly enough.

Clarice dropped in during the day, at an hour when she had reason to believe that Shipman would be out, and announced that she had come to say good-by. Hereafter, she explained, she would pin her faith to Ike Einstein. It appeared that he had invited her to come to him and get a job any time she was tired of being kicked downstairs by Dave Shipman.

"But you mustn't do that," Edith hurriedly assured her. "You'll be awfully sorry if you do!"

"What's the idea?"

"Of course I can't tell you anything; but you lie low till to-morrow, and I'll ask Mr. Shipman to write you this afternoon."

Clarice nodded, but without much hope. She had evidently lost faith in her old playfellow, and had dropped in more to satisfy her curiosity about the working out of the new experiment than to go through any formalities of farewell.

"How's things going?" she wanted to know.

"I've been fired once and taken back again. I expect to be fired once or twice more before night," Edith admitted.

The prophecy seemed about to be borne out that afternoon, when Shipman flew into one of his characteristic rages and threw an inkwell at the office boy, who had allowed an unwelcome caller to pass the sacred portal of the private room. The youth capably dodged the inkstand, but some of

its flying contents spattered over him and Miss Capen, wrecking the boy's coat sleeve and some handsome embroidery on Edith's one-piece gown.

"I'm sorry about that," Shipman muttered abashedly, looking at the stains on the dress.

"That's the least of it," she coolly told him, sopping up the ink with a blotter.

"I'll buy you a new dress," he went on. "Get anything you like, and put through a voucher."

"I never allow gentlemen to pay for my clothes. It's one of my rules," his secretary told him. "I can go without a new spring coat and buy another dress."

"I'll raise your salary a hundred a month. The dress didn't cost more than that, did it?"

"Only half as much; but it isn't worth while to raise my salary—I'm leaving so soon, you know."

"Good Lord!" he cried wearily. "Have we got to go through all that again?"

"You must see that I can't afford to stay here; but it's unfortunate that you didn't choose me as the only target. Jimmy will spread the story all over town, and there's a lot of talk about you already."

"Let 'em talk their fool heads off—damn 'em!"

"They're doing it, and—I don't know whether I ought to tell you this, but we agreed that I could say anything I wished—it's the kind of talk that's bad for business."

He faced her with the look of one whose nerves are at the snapping point.

"What d'you mean, bad for business?"

"I myself understand that these outbursts of yours are mere childishness—the result of a lack of elemental dignity and self-control."

"Oh!" he said in a choked voice. "You understand that, do you?"

"Yes—they're the result of having no poise, and of thinking you're so big and important that you can do anything you like, no matter how silly and how unworthy of a grown man it is. I understand all that, but people outside are not so charitable."

"Charitable! You think you're charitable! My God!" He laughed harshly. "You're so damned charitable," he said, "that I'm going to can you right now, and this time it's final!"

"All right, but let me finish, anyway."



It will be the last thing I can do for you. You ought to know that your enemies are starting a story that all these performances of yours are the result of some brain trouble. Of course you know that some very serious brain troubles begin with symptoms like these—uncontrollable excitement, rages over nothing—but you needn't worry about that," she added hastily, as she saw the look in his eyes. "You haven't any brain trouble."

"God! I should think *not*!"

But his big figure had slumped down in his chair and his dark face had whitened.

"You haven't," she repeated firmly; "but people will think you have, and they'll lose confidence in you. A story like that soon spreads, and it's hard for normal, sensible human beings to believe a grown man would act this way unless there was something wrong with him."

"There's a whole lot of 'em worse than I am," he muttered, staring at her like a half frightened, half furious child.

She was ruthless again.

"There isn't one who acts half as badly as you do. When I first came, you were like the rest of them—you were merely temperamental and unreasonable and easily excited. No one stopped you or reasoned with you, so you deteriorated at a frightful rate. Now everybody's gossiping, but no one has dared to speak to you about the gossip."

"They'd better not!"

"But you're getting extremely unpopular, Mr. Shipman. Have you noticed how few people come to see you now, compared to the number that came even a few weeks ago?"

"They know I've already cast the new production."

"But they also know that you'll soon cast another one. The truth is that many of them are afraid to come. Almost all of them, I think, would rather work for some one else."

She let that sink in, and then told him of Clarice's call and Ike Einstein's interest. The latter failed to alarm him, but he revealed an unexpected insight.

"He wants to get the inside dope of my office," he said scornfully; "but he's on the wrong track. He couldn't get it from Maggie. She's not the blabbing kind."

He dictated a letter to Maggie, promising her a place with "The Prince of Jazz." Then he leaned back with an air of deci-

sion and faced his secretary. His manner was calm, almost judicial.

"Now you've got all that off your chest, perhaps you'll quiet down for a few days," he suggested. "Meantime, you might analyze yourself once in awhile. You think you're perfect, don't you? Well, you're not, my girl! You've got a million miles to go. I could tell you a few things about yourself that would surprise you, and some day I'll do it!"

#### IV

AFTER that Dave himself quieted down, not for a few days, but for several weeks. He had sounded his few intimates and had discovered that Miss Capen's information as to current gossip was correct. He was shrewd enough to realize that the growth of such a reputation as he was acquiring would indeed be "bad for business." Only his office staff got the benefit of the change, however, for he had suddenly decided that he was not quite ready to put on the third production of the season.

During this restful interval he thought a good deal about his secretary, assuring himself that he loathed her. Incidentally, every afternoon, he read his correspondence with great care and took pleasure in baiting her.

"You're making me a regular *Pollyanna*," he sardonically assured her. "My letters are just full of sweetness and light. By the way"—a sudden thought came to him, and he obviously welcomed it—"where do you get that stuff? I'll tell the world it doesn't come out of you. You're just about as hard-boiled a virgin as they make 'em!"

"It's simply amazing how well you and I understand each other," Miss Capen softly commented.

"You bet we do! You're the kind of woman that would lead a man a dog's life if you married him," he went on, interested in the new theme and charmed by the opportunity to get back at her. "I'll bet the guy you marry won't know his soul's his own!"

That got under her skin. She flushed, and he continued his dictation with a grin of triumph. Perhaps it was due to this that her next criticisms on his character were even franker than their predecessors.

"I'm beginning to realize," she said, as she closed her notebook, two months later, when he had finished his correspondence,

"that your apparent cruelty was simply a matter of thickness of skin. I believe now that you really didn't know you were being cruel. There's a complete lack of sensitiveness and understanding about you—in your relation to other human beings. You crash through life as an elephant goes through a jungle."

He leaned back in his desk chair and studied her as she sat before him.

"Aside from that I'm all right, I hope," he grinned.

For some reason her criticisms had almost ceased to annoy him. Indeed, he sometimes appeared to enjoy them, and he certainly enjoyed the retaliation in which he constantly indulged.

She shook her head.

"You have brains," she admitted, as she rose to return to her own office, "and you're a prodigious worker. There isn't a lazy bone in you. Aside from those qualities I can't see that you have any good ones, except a sort of reckless generosity due to the fact that you're making more money than you know how to spend. You don't show any common sense or discrimination about your giving, and it doesn't include any self-sacrifice; so you don't deserve credit for it."

"Sit down and let's have this out," he invited. "You interest me strangely, as the playwrights say. Besides, I want to tell you some things about yourself, for a change," he added, as she hesitated.

When she had accepted his invitation, Dave leaned back in his chair, clasped his big hands behind his head, and went on easily:

"I don't deserve any credit for anything, according to you; but luckily you're here to bring up the average. Now, tell me something—how does it feel to think yourself so perfect that you can be a star of Bethlehem to all mankind?"

"I don't think anything of the sort."

"Don't you, though? Then you've got some pointers coming to you. Let me tell you right now that you're about the smuggest and the most self-centered human being I've ever known. You're a mass of egotism. Your kindness and gentleness are merely surface qualities—things you've grafted on your nature as matters of policy. You mean to get on, and you're getting on. You want to be popular, and you're popular with superficial observers; but I know you through and through."

"That is interesting," she admitted without rancor.

It was, and it made her thoughtful. Was it—could it be—possible that in any degree he was right? Was she really so obsessed by the mote in her neighbor's eye that she could not see the beam in her own?

She put the problem to Clarice the next time that minor luminary of "The Prince of Jazz" dropped into the offices—an attention rather rare since the new musical comedy had settled down for the long run that its producer had predicted. Clarice was very happy, very well dressed, very optimistic, and too busy for many calls. She was developing ambition, and was studying singing with an idea of working up to more important parts.

Also, her opinion of Dave had changed. She referred to him without rancor, and gave obvious consideration to a charge that Edith had expected her to repudiate with pained surprise.

"I wouldn't say you was exactly conceited, deary," she finally announced, in solution of the problem. "I'd just say that if any one introduced you to yourself, you'd get up and bow. You'd be meetin' some one you thought was worth while—see?"

This is an ungrateful world, but Clarice laughed when Edith mentioned the fact.

Edith's next jolt came after another interval of several months, which had been marked by various brisk interchanges of criticism between her and her chief. Late one afternoon, when the rest of the staff had departed, Shipman settled back in his desk chair and addressed his secretary with the manner of one who has the evening before him.

"Considering how you disapprove of me—I know you really do," he remarked, in answer to some light comment of hers, "I can't see why the devil you let yourself go on loving me!"

She was too much amazed to be angry.

"Loving you!" she gasped.

"You know you love me, don't you?" he asked in surprise; "or is it possible that you don't realize it yet? I've suspected it for months, but I wasn't quite certain till Maggie Murphy talked to me a few days ago. Maggie pointed out that a girl like you wouldn't be wasting time on me if you hadn't fallen for me. 'And when that happened,' Maggie said, 'of course she had to make you into somethin' fit to marry.'"

"This would be infuriating if it weren't so idiotic," Edith said with cold anger.

"Don't get excited," he urged. "I love you, too, so it ought to be all right, though God alone knows how we can possibly work it out. Perhaps you and He have some plans," he added simply. "If you have, let me in on them as soon as you can. The whole thing looks like a complete loss to me now."

As she was obviously unable to answer this, he picked up a manuscript and began to read it with a contented smile. *That* would give her something to think about! The breeze she created as she rose and hurried through the door fanned his brow.

# V

"I'm leaving, Mr. Shipman," Edith announced the next morning.

"I expected that. It's the nineteenth resignation. I've kept track of 'em."

"And you've discharged me eight times."

"Good! That shows a fine development in self-control. When are you leaving?"

"At the end of the week."

He nodded.

"That will be fine. I was beginning to feel that it was about time—though, to tell the truth, it's a little sooner than I had expected to be married. However, it will give us a week at Palm Beach before the production of 'The Dancing Dervish' comes up, so that's all to the good."

"I'm beginning to think," she said slowly, "that you really are insane!"

He shook his head at her.

"Tut, tut! Look at the poise and patience I've shown for the last six months in listening to your criticisms! Look at the judgment I've shown in picking out my future wife!" He leaned forward and took her hand. "My dear girl, why kick against the inevitable? You're acting like an unbroken colt, but you've met your master, and you know it. Stop working yourself into a rage, and kiss me. I can tell you by past experience that rages aren't worth while."

"I hate you!" she said. "I loathe and abominate and despise you!"

He nodded.

"I suppose you do. In girls of your temperament love is often mixed up with feelings like that. I was reading a play last night that went into the matter in some detail. It's a good play, too. I've

about decided to put it on." He returned to the earlier interest. "There's absolutely no question that you and I will lead a cat and dog life," he sighed; "but I'm ready to begin it any time you say. Whenever you make me see red, I'll remind myself, as I've been doing for the past five months, that it's because you adore me. You're the type that chastises when it loves. Every time you think you're fed up with me, remember what a superb job you made of me when you took me in hand—and don't forget," he cheerfully added, "that the reason you took me in hand was that you had decided to annex me, and that I was worth the trouble of making over. You were right about that, too!"

"Do you really think so?" she rather acidly inquired.

"Yep. Look at the facts! The only way you can tell me now from the modest violet is that I'm so much more modest than the violet is. I'm so gentle that callers cry on my shoulder. I'm so generous that I'm heading straight for the poorhouse. That club of East Side boys you made me interest myself in has written an anthem to me."

"It has all made you worse than ever," she declared. "The only change there is in you is that you don't usually show your self-content so plainly. I ought to have realized that it would be this way!"

He ignored the interruption.

"Did you know that I was made treasurer of the new Actors' Charity Fund last night?" he went on. "They say it's because I'm so kind and sympathetic. I think they must have been reading a lot of your letters. Old Mrs. Fallows informed Einstein, the other day, that I was like a son to her. I'm told there's a general feeling now among the theatrical rank and file that if they can get into one of my companies they're sure of a father's fostering care."

"Don't be so absurd!"

"Isn't it true? You know it's true; and the great pity is that I'm going to waste all these fine qualities on you. However, I suppose you're going to be the hammer of life that pounds me into shape—the harrow that churns me up. Although, as a matter of fact," he continued in a musing tone, "if you asked my opinion, I'd say I thought I was all right now, and that after we're married you and I ought to concentrate on improving *you*. How about being

married next Saturday, with that understanding?"

"I wouldn't marry you," she told him, "if—"

"If I was the last man on earth—I know. Why are you so ashamed of loving me? Dear girl, there's nothing to be ashamed of in loving a man—especially one whom you've made over in your own image and likeness, as it were."

"There is—there *is*! I *am* ashamed of loving you. I think all this apparent change in you is merely a bluff. I think you've made up your mind to get back at me, and that this is your notion of the way to do it. I think that underneath your new manner you're the same Nero you always were. I think—"

"Darling girl!"

He leaned forward and kissed her lips to stop the rush of words. It worked so well that he prolonged the interruption.

"You've got your whole life before you to tell me what you think of me," he assured her, after a long and silent interval; "so what's the use of trying to do it all at once? Besides, you're going to have nicer thoughts about me later on—yes, you are! Here, kiss me again!"

"Men don't make love that way," she muttered against his lips. "They don't take so much for granted."

"Don't they? Well, perhaps you can cure me of that, too. You know you'd

hate to feel as I do—that I'm such a perfect model that you simply can't put in any improvements next season."

She sighed.

"I wish I knew what to do with you!"

She was leaning back and smoothing the bobbed hair that he had made stand out around her head like a halo.

"You know darned well what you're going to do with me. You're going to marry me, and when you do, my girl, we'll both have our hands full. Compared to us, the Kilkenny cats will be a mere memory and the World War a friendly bout; but oh, *boy*, what fun we're going to have! To go home after a quiet day at the office and start a good knock-down-and-drag-out battle with you will make a new man of me. Here, kiss me again, and name the day!"

"You don't need me any more," she weakly protested.

He shook his head at her.

"I'm a man that needs an iron hand throughout life," he declared; "and you're a woman that has to be jumped on with both feet every night and morning. It's going to be mighty interesting. Of course, if you haven't the nerve for the experiment, or if you're afraid of the reforms I'm going to bring about in you—"

"I haven't got the bullying spirit out of you yet!" she breathlessly murmured, as he caught her in his arms. "All—right! Make—it—Saturday!"

## ROSES

YELLOW and creamy and pink-petaled roses,  
Budding and blooming on tree and on vine;  
Calyx of gold where the honey bee dozes,  
White as a snowdrift or crimson as wine;  
Roses as royal as queens in their glory,  
Roses as timid as novices young,  
Rhapsodists telling a wonderful story,  
Poets, whose lyrics the breezes have sung.

Velvety soft or with satinlike splendor,  
Salmon or copper or amethyst bright;  
Dancing like sprites or as wood genies tender—  
Beautiful roses, the garden's delight!  
Passing, each breeze with your perfume is freighted,  
Bearing your largess wherever it goes;  
Nothing so rare by the gods consummated,  
Nothing so sweet as the heart of a rose!

L. Mitchell Thornton



# Up a Tree

THE STORY OF A MAN WHO PROVED TO BE A MURDERER,  
AND OF THE STRANGE CHANCE THAT PREVENTED  
HIM FROM COMMITTING ANOTHER MURDER

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

AS an operator in round timber, Herb Bundel's methods were unusual, striking, even unique; and so they had been ever since the youngest of his three sons had acquired height and weight enough to man an ax or one end of a cross-cut saw. He operated *en famille*, as they say in Madawaska County; and though for a time it excited the amusement and even the derision of his neighbors, it seemed to pay. He always logged on Gunwad Brook or thereabouts, paying stumpage to the government, and selling his cut "on the brow" to one or another of the big operators on the river.

As soon as the potatoes were dug and housed on the Bundel farm at Bundel's Bridge, the autumnal migration of the Bundel family began. A few loads of supplies were hauled in even before the mudholes were frozen. One of the boys accompanied Herb in with the first cargo, which was usually of oats and baled hay, and remained right there, cleaning up, carpentering, swamping roads, and acting as caretaker. With the very last load came Mrs. Bundel, the churn, and two or three cows.

In the year 1922 the Bundels completed their migration on the night of the 29th of October. They had left old Nehemiah Inch back home, as usual, to look after the place and what remained there of the live stock.

All assembled, their strength in winter quarters on Gunwad was as follows—Herb and Mrs. Bundel, May Belle, George, Sam, Peter, and, for the first time, a person who was not a member of the family, Ed Racer by name. Of live stock they had three cows—Mrs. Bundel had no faith in Nehemiah as a butter maker—three horses, a pig, fourteen fowls, and a cat.

One end of the main camp was partitioned off for a dairy. There stood the churn, and there the milk was "set" in broad pans on whitewashed shelves. The other end of the main camp, also boarded off, was a bedroom for Mrs. Bundel and May Belle. It had a little stove of its own, a real bed with a feather tick and sheets, and red curtains at the little window. Between this room and the dairy were the bunks for the men, the mess table, and the cookstove. The cows, the pig, and the chickens shared the horses' "hovel."

In some ways this was an unusual logging camp. Here the wash line flapped bright cotton dresses along with dull gray masculine shirts and socks. Here was a rocking-chair with a red cushion. Here, every morning, the crowing of a rooster set wild cats and foxes to prowling around and around and licking their hungry chops. Here—but why go on? Mrs. Bundel was the best cook on the river. Herb Bundel took his home right along with him when he went logging on Gunwad Brook.

Ed Racer was a lucky man to be working for Herb Bundel. He had turned up at Bundel's Bridge in September, and had worked with Morgan's threshing outfit for ten days or so. Then he had persuaded Herb Bundel to hire him for the potato digging. He was a good workman. He had pleasant manners, and, to listen to him, a splendid character.

He did not volunteer much information, but he answered questions. He had been born and raised in a town on the main river. Yes, he had received good schooling. No, he hadn't a home now—not what you could call a real home. His mother had died while he was overseas, and his father had married again.

Yes, he had been to the war. Wounded? Well, yes—twice, and gassed once. Well, he guessed he had done his duty, but he didn't hold with bragging about it. Yes, he reckoned he had killed his share of the poor fellows opposite, but that was nothing to be proud of. Sure, hand to hand; but he did not hold with bloodshed, and in his opinion there had been too much cursing and too much rum in the army. Ed was indeed a fine character.

## II

CHARLIE MACLUSH worked a line of traps on Gunwad Brook. He had come in early, across the height of land, and had built himself a shack about five miles above Bundel's camp. When he had been discharged from hospital, eight months before, the doctors had told him to live in the open air, summer and winter, for at least three years; so he had got him a dog and taken to the woods.

Though a slick hand with a rifle, Charlie MacLush was a poor trapper. For several weeks the fur bearing animals of Gunwad had a whole lot of amusement and about a hundred pounds of bait at his expense; but he was persistent. He studied his book on woodcraft, called to mind all the trapper yarns he had ever heard, and tried again and yet again.

Just after the second fall of snow he fooled a bobcat. A mink was his second victim, and a lynx his third. He was getting the hang of it. By the 5th of December he calculated his skins to be worth all of fifty dollars. He bagged a fisher the very next day; but when he and his dog Prince got back to camp, about an hour before sundown, they found the door open, the provisions chucked around, and the prunes, sugar, and dried apples conspicuously absent.

They went right after the thief, Prince leading the way. They had not far to go. The bear was traveling slowly, and halting often, as if his stomach was not feeling exactly right. He was a full grown male with a splendid coat. Two shots did the business.

"We got the best of that deal," said Charlie to his dog.

True enough, but that didn't sugar his tea. He thought of the logging camp that he had remarked farther downstream soon after his arrival on Gunwad, and he wondered if it was occupied yet. He had not

been within four miles of it since September, for his trap lines did not run in that direction. He hoped that the loggers had moved in, for neither his palate nor his stomach would accept molasses as a substitute tea sweetener.

He and Prince went to find out, first thing next morning. The snow was loose and dry, and not too deep for the dog. They had not gone three miles when they heard a booming thud off on their right front. Charlie recognized it as the crash of a big tree to earth.

"They're here," he said to Prince. "We'll get our sugar, and maybe a mess of prunes. Wonder what kind of cook they got? Half a dozen real doughnuts wouldn't go bad, nor a beef bone with marrow in it, hey?"

Prince dashed ahead at the word "bone," for the last bone of the last quarter of the little buck deer which MacLush had killed in October had been cracked seven days ago, since when he had been living on flapjacks and fish and beans, like a weak-jawed human. His teeth yearned for something to gnaw on.

Later, Charlie heard the *puck* of an ax, the clank of a frosty twitching chain, the *wish-swish* of saws, the crack, the windy sway, and the smashing fall of more trees; but he held on straight ahead for the camp.

The first view of the camp was a comprehensive one. He and Prince halted and stared. Three cows aired themselves in the windless sunshine before the hovel, and a flock of hens scratched for oats among scattered hay. Two milk pails hung from pegs beside a door of the main building, shining like silver. From a clothesline hung, among prosaic woolen socks and shirts, two pairs of long pinky stockings and a thin pinkish dress or something.

"Will you look where we got ourselves to?" said Charlie MacLush to his dog. "A complete home—cows and chickens and—and everything!"

The door beside the gleaming milk pails opened, and May Belle stood gracefully on the threshold.

"If that's the cook, then it's me for washing up the dishes and filling up the wood box," announced the trapper, his voice a little unsteady with emotion.

He advanced into the clearing. He was well received by Mrs. Bundel and May Belle, who said they had both sugar and prunes to spare, and laughed at the story

of the thieving bear. Then the cat chased Prince around and around, and the girl chased the cat and shut her in the bedroom.

"To think of you being only five miles upstream all this time and us not knowing it!" exclaimed Mrs. Bundel.

"Me not knowing it is what sores me," returned Charlie frankly.

No, they were not old friends. Charlie had never seen a Bundel before, to his knowledge, and no Bundel had ever seen Charlie MacLush before. The trapper was originally from a long way the other side of the height of land.

He and Prince were invited to stop to dinner. They accepted. Dinner was just about ready to dish up. May Belle opened the door and blew three strong blasts on a battered tin horn.

"It's only a little operation we got," said Mrs. Bundel to Charlie. "Only the family. It's more comfortable that way, and less risky."

"Only the family?" he queried. "They sounded mighty busy and numerous as I came along. It must be a big family!"

"Well, there's Ed Racer—he's jist about the same as one of the family."

"How do you make that out, ma?" asked the girl, turning from hanging the dinner horn on a nail.

"What I mean is, we like him. He's a fine young man. He's a good young man. Maybe you're acquainted with him, Mr. MacLush?"

"Racer? Guess not. Knew a man named Pacer once, and two lads named Rider. No, ma'am, I don't call any Racer to mind."

As Herb Bundel and his sons and Ed came stamping in, they all greeted the stranger cordially. They had no more than sat down at table before George Bundel began to tell his one sad story. It was his custom to tell it to every pair of fresh ears he came across. He was the eldest of Herb's three sons. In 1916, at the age of sixteen, he had enlisted in the artillery. He had sworn that he was eighteen. They—the authorities—had learned his true age in some mysterious way; and they had kept him right there on Partridge Island until the war was all over, drilling and drilling on those big guns till he knew them by heart.

"Where was the sense in that?" he demanded. "I was good, I tell you. Why

didn't they give me a chance, after learning me the whole bag of tricks? Maybe I might 'a' pulled off a D. C. M., the same as Ed here. I soldiered for two years, anyhow, and didn't even get the Service Medal, because they wouldn't send me overseas."

"Tough!" returned Charlie. "Rot-ten!" He glanced at Ed Racer. "D. C. M., hey?" he added.

"That was nothing," said Racer.

The voice and manner were modest, as usual. To the trapper they seemed a trifle uneasy.

"Issued with the rations," added Racer.

"Oh, sure!" returned Charlie.

"Maybe you was at the war yerself, Mr. MacLush," suggested Mrs. Bundel.

Charlie hesitated a second before he answered. All eyes were upon him. Then he held up his right hand.

"How could I, with my trigger finger cut off?" he asked.

It seemed to him that Ed Racer looked relieved.

"But you shot that bear," said May Belle.

"Oh, sure, but it's different in the army. That was only a bear, and I'm only a trapper. You got to shoot with the first finger of the right hand when you're in the army, or they won't let you shoot at all."

After dinner the women let Charlie MacLush help them dry the dishes; and they gave him sugar and prunes, and bones for Prince, and an invitation to call again as often as he wanted to. On his way home, for the first half of the distance his thoughts were busy with May Belle and for the second half with Ed Racer.

"Seems to me I've seen something like him somewhere before," he told himself. "There's more to modesty than laying claim to it, and there's more to holiness than holding off cussing and hollering 'Oh, fie!' at the mention of hard liquor. I don't say he isn't as good as he lets on to be, but the look in his eyes is against him. I don't say he isn't a hero; but if he is, then anybody's welcome to say I'm a skunk under the barn. He's sure setting pretty there among the Bundels! Well, I don't like him, but what of it? Live and let live, that's my motto; but I got to admit to myself that the longer I keep on living handy to that snake-faced model of piety and virtue, the sooner I'm likely to up and bust him one on the snoot!"

Two days later, Prince flushed three

partridges out of a fluffy snowbank. The birds pitched in a leafless poplar. Charlie knocked the stupid head off the lowest one with his first shot. With a second round he knocked the equally stupid head off the upper bird, the middle one being partially screened by twigs. The falling of the second bird through the boughs sent the third zooming away to parts unknown.

"If I was as modest as Racer lets on to be, I'd say I hit them by accident," said the marksman to Prince. He picked up the headless birds. "A nice little supper for May Belle and her mother!"

The sun was no more than down before he was at the Bundel camp, birds in hand and dog at heel. Again he received a hearty welcome.

"Where you been all this long while?" asked Mrs. Bundel. "May Belle was wondering if you'd got lost in the woods."

Two days, mind you! The trapper tried to catch the girl's eye, but failed in the attempt. He felt a glow and a thrill. He remained to supper; and, after supper, to a wild tune played on a mouth organ by George, he danced what passed for the Highland fling.

Charlie became a regular visitor at the Bundel home. He spent Christmas there. He averaged two and a half visits a week throughout the winter, or twenty-five miles of tramping through the woods for purely social purposes. This meant the expenditure of considerable time and energy; so he shortened his trap lines.

One night along in March, George Bundel called on him. George seemed to have something on his mind.

"Say, Charlie, we all like you fine," he said.

"That works both ways," returned the trapper. "What's troubling you, George?"

"Well now, it's like this—Ed Racer, he recollected all of a sudden, last night, where he'd seen you before; and he felt it was his duty to up and tell us. He felt real bad about it. He made us promise not to mention it to yerself, nor let it make any difference in the way we treated you; but I didn't promise. He said as how it wasn't so much a bad heart as a weak character, and rum often got a man into a jam like that."

"Sounds reasonable to me. What was the jam he had in mind?"

"It was a fight, Charlie."

"Well, it might have been, at that."

"It was a fight in London."

"In London, hey? That would be some battlefield, London!"

"It happened this way, so Ed says—he was over to London, on pass from the front, and him and two friends was out for a walk one night, and a policeman come running and ordered them to come along and lend him a hand in the king's name. He led them to a low dive, and there was a crowd of drunks busting chairs on each other and a lot of girls yelling blue murder; and you was there, Charlie, with one arm around a girl and busting a bottle on a policeman's head with t'other hand."

"Well, well!" returned Charlie. "So that's how we met before, was it? Maybe he's pretty near right, at that. I kind of suspicioned I'd seen that splendid face before, and those beautiful honest eyes. So that was it, was it? London, hey?"

"I don't hold with you there, Charlie. I don't like the look of his eye, and never did; but maybe you spoke sarcastic."

"Well, maybe. What else did he say?"

"He said it was a guilty conscience made you deny being over there to the war."

"And what did your—your mother say?"

"She blamed it all on the rum and the women; and May Belle—say, she surely did get excited. She dropped some dishes, and broke 'em. She asked Ed why he didn't tell it to you, instead of bawling it out to the rest of the world. She stood up and hollered at him: 'You tell it to himself, next time he calls!' It was all ma could do to quiet her down and make her see how Ed didn't want to hurt your feelings."

"Bless her heart!" said MacLush gravely. "Well now, George, you listen to me. I had my reason for not telling about being a soldier. I didn't get clear of hospital till thirteen or fourteen months ago. Gas—lungs. I didn't want folks thinking I had one lung in the grave, so to speak. Fact is, I'm as sound as you are now. I had another reason, too. I didn't like Ed Racer's looks, nor the place he seemed to occupy in your family. I kind of suspicioned I'd seen him before; so I figured that if he kept right on thinking he was the only man of war on Gunwad Brook, he'd maybe make a monkey of himself—and I guess he's done it."

"Was he lyin'?"

"Yes and no. A half lie's harder to



beat than a whole one; but he's been stringing you folks right along. I could step downstream and call him a liar and bust him on the nose to-morrow, but what would that prove? That he has blood in his nose, maybe. I got to do better than that. I got to prove he's a liar, and show him up for keeps, so everybody'll be satisfied; but that 'll take time. How soon will you folks be clearing out for home?"

"Pretty soon now, before the hauling goes. We always run it pretty close. Two years ago we drug over bare ground most of the way with our last load."

"Well, if I don't find you in camp, I'll find you at Bundel's Bridge. Don't you say a word to scare Ed Racer. Leave all this talk of ours right under your hat. I want for him to be on hand when I call to show him up. It's this way, George—I wasn't holding on to that girl, but how the hell could I prove I wasn't? And I hadn't drank more'n two, three beers, and I didn't hit any damn policeman with a bottle, but I can't prove that I didn't. When I prove a dozen other lies on him, then folks will take my word about that night in Villiers Street!"

### III

THE Bundels waited for Charlie MacLush to call again. Three days, four days, five days they waited, but he did not come; and George Bundel did not say a word to the purpose.

Then Herb quit work early one afternoon and made the trip upstream to the trapper's camp. He was back soon after sundown, with the amazing information that the camp was shut and deserted.

"Looks like he'd heard something about what you told us, Ed, and run away for very shame," said Mrs. Bundel.

"It sure looks that way," admitted Racer; "but how'd he hear of it? Could he 'a' been outside when I was telling it—spying around? Looks like he still had a conscience, anyhow. That's something!"

"The hell you say!" exclaimed George.

They all looked at George. His round face was red with embarrassment.

"You went and told him!" accused Mrs. Bundel.

George could not deny it.

"Looks like he cleared out, anyhow," observed Herb.

"Cleared out?" cried George, casting discretion to the winds. "Sure he did, but

he'll come back!" He glared at Ed Racer. "And when Charlie MacLush gets back with what he went for, you—look—out! He knows all about *you*, Racer. A man can change his name easier'n he can change his face, or his record in the army. You and yer D. C. M.!"

The effect of these words on Ed Racer was far beyond George's expectation. The fellow went as gray as a dishcloth. His lower jaw sagged, and remained so for long seconds. He stared at George, and George and all the others stared at him. He tried to speak; but it was not until the third or fourth attempt that audible words came.

"Where'd he go to?"

George did not answer Racer's question. He felt that he had already said too much. He had suggested more than he knew, and a shot in the dark had drawn blood. Pure luck; but he would not strain his luck.

"What lies was he telling now?"

George shook his head. Then Racer laughed. Nobody laughed with him. He blustered, sneering at the man who had run away. The Bundels sat without a word among them, staring at him with a variety of expressions.

Presently Racer leaped to his feet, and, in a voice which rose swiftly to a crazy scream, he told them what he would do to Charlie MacLush when next he met the fellow. The Bundels had never before heard Ed swear, but they heard him now. Mrs. Bundel clapped her hands to her ears and May Belle went as white as paper. Even Herb and the boys were shaken.

During the next ten days Racer tried hard to live down that outburst. He attributed it to shell shock. His efforts and excuses were useless, though he did not know it. He made several attempts to obtain fuller information concerning MacLush's last talk with George, but they profited him nothing. George was now the soul of discretion. He would not be coaxed or tricked.

"That ain't fair, George," complained Racer. "A man's got a right to hear what's said about him, so he can deny it if it's false."

"Zat so? You didn't think so when you was backbiting MacLush."

"That was different. What I told about him was for the good of yer family—a warning to my friends. It was my duty to yer folks."

"Yer sacred duty," jeered George.

Racer was unsettled. He eased off on his work and did a great deal of apparently aimless wandering in the woods. He glanced frequently to his rear when out and about, and when housed he often looked at the doors and windows. He was obviously apprehensive of something — of MacLush's return, beyond a doubt; but he evidently intended to stand his ground.

The truth is that he was only waiting for the Bundels to clear out. He had a plan for dealing with MacLush, but what he would do if the trapper should turn up before the Bundels' departure was more than he could include in his scheme. It was a risk he had to take.

He believed that if MacLush held off until the Bundels were gone, his plan would prove both practical and efficacious. Then, he calculated, the cause of his trouble would soon be forgotten by the simple Bundels, and his old standing in the family would be regained. Regained? Yes, and improved upon. He would marry May Belle in June!

The Bundels went home on the very last of the sledding. The hauling out was not nearly so formidable an operation as the hauling in had been, for their supplies for man and beast had been reduced almost to the vanishing point. The move was completed in two turns. Racer went out with the second and last load. That is to say, he started out with it, but he did not stay with it for more than a few miles.

"Hold yer horses!" he exclaimed to George. "Say, did you see my pack?"

George had not seen it. They looked over the load, but could not find it. No, George hadn't seen it on Sam's sled.

"I left it on the woodpile, so's to have it handy on top of the load. My mind must be failing, I guess. Say, I got to go back for it. Wouldn't lose it for a hundred dollars. All the letters my mother wrote me when I was at the front is in it."

"Taking yer rifle back with you?" asked George suspiciously.

"My rifle? What's the great idee, George? Wild cats?"

"I was only asking."

"Well, I guess I don't need it. If I meet up with a bear, I'll side-step him. Reckon my rifle went along on the first load."

George's foolish suspicion was stilled. He and the big horses and the loaded sled moved on toward home, and Ed Racer headed back for camp.

Racer found his precious pack exactly where he had left it—not on the woodpile, but tucked away in the loft above the hovel. Perhaps it contained the letters of which he had spoken so feelingly to George Bundel. It certainly contained cooked meats, bread, butter, tea, sugar, and a small kettle. Also, in a corner of the same loft, he found his rifle and some blankets. He did not express surprise at the discovery.

He did not enter the main camp. Equipped with pack, rifle, and blankets, he headed upstream. Only occasional patches of snow remained in the woods; and these he avoided with the utmost care. He approached the trapper's shack cautiously. Upon catching sight of a thin plume of smoke above the squat chimney, he edged away to the left; but his sharp eyes had noted a tall spruce at the edge of the little clearing, and had carefully observed its position in relation to the cabin door.

#### IV

CHARLIE MACLUSH was limping when he and his big dog Prince reached the little shack on Gunwad Brook, several hours before noon. He had twisted his left ankle in some old brush earlier in the morning.

"We'll rest up a couple of days right here," he told Prince. "No hurry. We got the world by the tail and Holy Ed by the short hairs!"

He fetched water from the convenient spring in two pails which the Bundels had given him in December. The shack was well stocked with grub and dry wood. He made a fire on the clay hearth, sliced salt pork into a frying pan, filled the teakettle, and then took his ease on folded blankets within arm's length of the sizzling meat.

Thus he remained throughout the afternoon and evening. He was comfortable and in good heart. In his pack in the corner reposed that which he had gone back across the height of land to get — proof that Ed Racer was a liar. His ankle was already feeling and looking better.

Prince was uneasy, however. He sprang to the door three or four times, with his hackles up. Charlie supposed that a bear was prowling around. He bolted the door before dark. He was awakened twice before midnight by the dog's furious growling. He had his rifle handy.

When he hopped across to the door first thing in the morning, to let Prince out, he took his rifle with him. The big dog nosed

the frozen ground, then crossed the little clearing in a dozen jumps. He went straight to the base of an old spruce which towered high above the forest tangle behind it. He circled the base, leaping and scrambling through and over a crisscross of old blow-downs. He lifted his muzzle and gave tongue.

Charlie, with a shoulder against an edge of the doorway and most of his weight on his right foot, stared up at the close, dark spire of the tree.

"A bear, or a wild cat, or maybe only a porkypine—but it's up there, whatever it is," he reflected.

Just then he saw the tip of a stiff bough quivering, high up. He brought the butt of his rifle to his shoulder. He judged the position of the juncture of that bough with the trunk. The sharp tip of the fore sight came into the notch of the back sight. He pressed the trigger.

Nothing moved up there in the rough green tower. Nothing—bear, wild cat or porcupine—came tumbling down.

"Missed him clean," said Charlie. "Fair enough! He's welcome to go die of old age, for all of me. I got something better to do these days than mess around with a skinning knife. Never heard of spelling it that way before—'May Belle.' Unique—and so's herself!"

He ejected the empty shell, closed the door against the frosty morning, hopped back to the hearth, and built up the fire. When breakfast was ready, he looked out again and saw that Prince was still on guard at the base of the tall spruce. He called the dog in.

"Live and let live, can't you?" he admonished him.

MacLush continued to nurse his ankle all that day. The night passed peacefully, without so much as a growl out of Prince. After a rest of forty-five hours he had both feet under him again. He nailed the door tight, hitched his pack high, slung his rifle, and stepped out joyously; but he paused for a few seconds at the base of the big spruce and peered upward at the brown-green gloom. He saw nothing but stiff boughs and harsh foliage.

The dog reared full height against the big trunk and whined.

"Come along, and don't show your ignorance," said Charlie. "Not even a porkypine would be fool enough to stop and take a chance of having Sergeant Mac-

Lush loose off a second round at him. You must have served in the same outfit as Ed Racer—the Oxford Circus Diehards!"

At the Bundel camp they paused only long enough to make sure that the buildings were deserted.

"Now for Bundel's Bridge!" cried Charlie. "Twenty-five miles, and then we'll see who's who and what's what!"

It was then eight o'clock. The footing was rough, and, as the sunshine struck fuller, it became muddy and slippery in spots; but Charlie slogged along at the rate of three and a half miles an hour. He did not light a fire at noon, but dined on cold victuals and cold water. He and Prince were on again in fifteen minutes.

At four in the afternoon they sighted the long gray roof of the bridge; and a few minutes later Charlie inquired the whereabouts of Herb Bundel's farm of a little gray woman at the kitchen door of a little gray house. She pointed with a toil-warped finger.

"There's a short cut," she said. "Straight across the fields to them three big pines, and straight through the strip of bush beyond, and there you'll see the Bundel homestead laid out right under yer nose, pretty as a picture. And who might you be, young man?"

But Charlie was already on his way.

"Name of MacLush," he called across a shoulder. "See you later, ma'am—pressing business!"

He made short work of the short cut. Without pausing to knock, he opened the door and walked right into the kitchen and the assembled family, with Prince at his heels.

"Here I am back!" he exclaimed. "I'm right here to tell Ed Racer he's a liar, and then to prove it. Where's he at? Duty before pleasure!"

Mrs. Bundel and Herb and the three sons all talked at once.

"He went back for his pack—you must 'a' passed him somewhere."

"Sure, that was Toosday morning. Did you try the doors? Maybe something happened to him."

"Said his rifle was on the load ahead, but it wasn't. Afear'd to stop and meet you, I bet a dollar!"

"Looks kinder that way, I must say."

Then May Belle spoke in a gentle voice.

"It wouldn't do any hurt to prove he's a liar, even if he isn't here," she suggested.

"That suits me," returned Charlie. "I've been having my daydreams of busting him one or two on the nose, I must admit—but that 'll keep. Sure I'll prove he's a liar!"

By this time he had his pack on the floor and open, and was digging into it.

"D'ye mind all his talk about his Distinguished Conduct Medal? He told all about the color of the ribbon, so George told me. What color did he say it was?"

"White with a blue stripe," said Mrs. Bundel.

"That's it," agreed Herb; "white, with a wide blue stripe down the middle. He told us about it often enough."

"Well, here's one of them," announced Charlie, straightening his long back and extending his right hand with a dramatic gesture. A silver medal on a red and blue ribbon dangled from his fingers. "If that's white, I'm yellor! There's my name cut on the edge of it. That's when my trigger finger was shot off; and here's a colored picture of it, and others, cut out of a history of the war. Looks like Mr. Ed Racer got his D. C. M. mixed up with some other hero's Military Cross!"

The Bundels pressed close, staring, admiring, expressing their astonishment. May Belle took the medal from Charlie, held it reverently, and gazed at it with glowing eyes.

"But that don't prove he didn't meet you in London, like he said he did—and that's more to me nor the color of a ribbon, Charlie MacLush," challenged Mrs. Bundel.

"Maybe it don't, and maybe it does; but if he was here I'd give him the lie to that, too, and I'd make him eat it, along with his teeth and—"

The girl interrupted him.

"You don't have to, Charlie! If he'd lie about this, he'd lie about anything. Why, when he heard you'd gone to fetch back the truth about him he pretty near died of fright. His face went the color of—of lard, and then he bust out cussing and raving something terrible."

"He sure did," said Herb. "He was scairt of more and worse than being made a liar of about the color of a bit of ribbon, if you was to ask me."

## V

MAY BELLE BUNDEL and Charlie MacLush were married in June. They went

on a wedding tour to Maine; and there, in Caribou County, Charlie ran across an old friend of Flanders days, Sewell by name. In civil life, Sewell was a grower of potatoes in a large way. He cultivated twelve hundred acres. With splendid faith in his former sergeant's knowledge of men and potatoes, he offered him the job of field boss.

The offer was promptly accepted. Charlie wrote to George Bundel, authorizing his father-in-law to dispose of the shack and traps on Gunwad in whatever way he thought best, and to send his dog Prince along to him by express.

Prince arrived at Caribou in due course. Life went along happily with Mr. and Mrs. Charles MacLush, and the potatoes in Charlie's care flourished.

May Belle sometimes spoke of Ed Racer, of whom nothing more had been seen or heard.

"I'd like to know what it was he thought you could prove on him, to make him clear out like that," she said one day. "Something worse than a lie, I guess!"

"Maybe so, but I guess he lost all hope of getting you the very first time he met me," replied Charlie. "It was you he was after, and he wasn't blind. The way you lamped me that first day at dinner was enough to put anybody wise to the facts of the case. I saw it myself, even before we set down to table. 'Here's my finish,' I says to myself. 'That big red-headed girl means to be Mrs. Charles MacLush, and nothing can stop her.' So I reckon Racer changed his plans pretty near as soon as I changed mine. Anybody could see you loved me to desperation, the way you lit on your cat for chasing my poor little dog—hey, Prince?"

"You and your dog! Please be serious. What d'ye suppose that Ed Racer did with himself?"

"Speaking seriously, I bet a dollar he went off into the woods and shot a hole through his head. That's what I'd 'a' done, if a better man had come along and snatched you away from me!"

Talk of that kind did not do much to clear up the mystery of Racer's disappearance. Charlie felt little or no curiosity on the subject. He had plenty to do without bothering his head about that mysterious four-flusher.

In September, however, a letter came to him from George Bundel that brought the



whole affair of his one-time rival very vividly back to his mind. George wrote:

DEAR CHARLIE:

There is a man here from Fredericton calling himself a detective and looking for a murderer. And that's what he is all right, I guess. And who's the murderer he's looking for, do you suppose? Well, his name is John Bent Grames, but from the way he tells about him, his looks and ways and all, and that mole on his neck, it's the man we called Ed Racer. Mr. Smith, the detective, says he's dead sure of it.

Well, this J. B. Grames, or Ed Racer, was in the army. He was in London quite a spell in the military police. When he was drafted for France, he gave them the slip. He deserted and hid right there in London. Grew whiskers, and called himself a Russian, and lived with a Russian woman. But he beat it when the war was finished, and left the Russian woman behind, and she got mad and went and told some general all about it. But he got to Montreal.

They pretty near caught him there, only he killed the man who tried to arrest him. The police traced him here and there in the woods all around Quebec. He called himself by a French name, and then by an Irish name. They lost track of him for quite a spell. Sometimes he wore whiskers, and sometimes he shaved, but he always had that mole on his neck, and he never quit talking about what a hell of a hero he was in the war for more than a day or two. You'd think he'd have sense enough to keep his mouth shut about the war, wouldn't you?

He married a woman up north, a widow—naming himself Kelly or something at that time—but something scared him all of a sudden, and he beat it with two hundred dollars out of her sock and her best horse.

Now this detective, Mr. Steve Smith, says for you to go and tell a notary public all you know about this man and swear to it and send it to him, care of the sheriff at Fredericton, without loss of time. Make it snappy, he says.

Hoping you are well, as this leaves me,

Yours respectfully,

GEORGE BUNDEL.

Charlie passed the letter to May Belle.

"He was surely the champeen liar! Nothing but a military policeman in London! Well, that's all I know of him—that everything he said was a lie!"

## VI

MACLUSH's shack on Gunwad Brook remained unoccupied that winter. Squirrels, mice, a porcupine, and occasional hunting weasels had the run of it, except for one night in March. A man of mixed bloods—Scottish, French, and Milicete—happened along that way an hour before sundown, and decided to stop the night there. He was traveling on snowshoes and hauling a little toboggan. He pried the door open and stepped right in, webs and toboggan and all.

He found enough dry wood to start a fire, and that was all; for everything else had been cleared out by George Bundel in December. He stacked the wood on the hearth and touched a match to it, and then went out with his ax to rustle fuel for the night. He went straight to the base of the big spruce, and around it to the crisscross of old blowdowns. Dry wood was what he wanted, and here it was.

Stepping from the wind-packed snow to one of the prostrate trunks, he commenced hacking off the gray prongs. He had not been more than five minutes at work when he saw that which stayed his swing and bulged his eyes. It was a rifle. It lay in the forks of two branches of the very blowdown on which he stood.

For a moment the man stared at it. Then he shuffled along and lifted it from its resting place. It was a rifle, all right—a good one, at that—a mite rusty, but all there. He gazed around, then down again at the weapon in his hands.

"Must 'a' been some damfool sport," he said. "Nobody else fool 'nough to lay down his gun an' forgit it." Talking to himself was a habit of his. "Gov'nor, you strike luck. Oil 'im up, an' you got two guns. You don't shoot 'em both to once, Gov'nor! Sell one—twenty dollar, maybe!"

Governor Paul was his name. He was a character. He "lived on the gun" six or seven months of every year, and on the government—in this or that or the other jail—the rest of the time. The life suited him.

He cleaned the gun that evening, using hot water, melted bear's grease, a corner of a dirty blanket, and a strip torn from an equally dirty shirt. He made a good job of it, but he had difficulty with the bolt. When he managed to pull that back, he found a shell in the chamber.

"All ready to shoot—an' then he lays it down an' forgits it! Good gun, too—twenty-five dollar, maybe. Damn queer t'ing! You strike 'im lucky, Gov'nor! Somethin' scare 'im, maybe—all of a sudden—an' he run like 'ell. Somethin' up that big tree, maybe—owl or Injun devil let out a holler up there, an' he drop 'is gun an' jump for home!"

He chuckled at the picture presented to his inner eye by his lively imagination.

The wanderer left the shack next morning, with the mysteriously acquired rifle

hidden in the very heart of the toboggan's ragged freight. Though he dined and rested several hours at Herb Bundel's camp, he did not exhibit his strange find, or even mention it. He was afraid that one of the Bundels might know something of its ownership or history, and his greed was stronger than his curiosity.

Three weeks later he disposed of the rifle down on the main river. With fifteen dollars and two bottles of gin on his person, he stepped out and demanded the freedom of the city. He recovered consciousness in jail; but, as it happened to be one of his favorite jails, he did not complain.

"Best watch yer step, Gov'nor, or some sweet day you'll be locked up for good," chided the jailer. "Where'd you pick it up this time?"

"Pick it up in the woods," replied Governor Paul. "Beats hell what a real smart man kin pick up in the woods!"

## VII

CHARLIE MACLUSH liked his job well enough, though there was one serious drawback to it, to his way of thinking. It allowed him more slack time than he wanted during the winter months, but it did not give him even a day to himself in what he considered the best season of the whole year in the northern woods. What he wanted was to start for Bundel's Bridge about the beginning of October, and to go on from there to his shack on Gunwad Brook with plenty of grub and ammunition and ten days of freedom in which to shoot a bull moose and a buck deer.

The longer he went without it, the more he thought of it, and the more he thought of it the more he wanted it; until at last, in the fall of 1925, he up and helped himself to it.

He and George Bundel reached the deserted shack before dark. A wind had kicked up at sundown; and while they rustled wood and water, cleared porcupine quills out of the bunk, and cooked supper, it kicked harder and higher. It swept through and over the forest with sounds as of flooding waters. It tore at the rotting bark on the roof, shouldered the door, swished a tail down the chimney, and sent smoke and sparks flying.

"Heaven help all poor sailors ashore to-night!" said Charlie.

"You're dead right," returned George gravely. "Hark to that!"

A booming crash, dulled by distance, told them that some old tree had been wrenched from its root hold and laid flat.

"There'll be a lot of dead wood culled out to-night," added George.

"I hope it has sense enough to stick to the dead wood," said Charlie.

They turned in soon after supper. The bunk was wide, and furnished with plenty of fresh boughs and blankets; and George was soon sound asleep. Charlie was kept awake by the unpleasant behavior of the wind. He would not more than get snuggled down right, with the blankets up to his chin, when a splinter of the tempest would snake down the chimney and scatter red embers over the floor. He would turn out and hunt the embers. Then he would return to the bunk and get the blankets and the mattress of boughs fixed just right again; and then another sliver of wind would lick down the chimney.

Thus it happened that he was not asleep when the thing happened; but he was in the bunk, and his eyes were slowly closing. There was a brief lull in the flowing of the wind; and then there was a rolling roar, which swelled swiftly to terrific, immeasurable proportions, stunning the ear and numbing the heart. It was a madness of sound, as of the approach of all the surf of the seven seas and all the galloping horses of the world. Then came rendings and rippings and an indescribable crash; and at that moment Charlie rolled from the splintering bunk to the quivering floor, dragging George Bundel after him.

Charlie struggled out through a gap in what had been a long wall. He did not know whether he had been struggling for two minutes or for thirty. He noticed that the wind had fallen to an ordinary blow, and that it was too chilly to be pleasant. His nose was full of smoke and the dust of rotted wood. He sneezed, and felt better. Then he heard the voice of George, strong but peevish:

"Lend a hand here, can't you?"

He stooped, fumbled about, and pulled his brother-in-law forth.

"It fell down," complained George. "Couldn't 'a' been built right."

"Fell down! Have a heart! So would any house you could build, with that old spruce smashing down fair atop of it. We're lucky to be alive!"

"Zat what happened? That big spruce? Thought I heard something."

"D'ye smell smoke? Look up there—she's afire!"

A tongue of yellow flame flickered up from the ruins of the shack, fell back, and licked up again, taller and stronger. It illuminated coils of smoke and a bulky mass that was the upper branches of the uprooted tree. It licked into the mass of crushed branches, and snapped and spread there; and the wind fanned it and tossed up a cloud of sparks.

"If that gits a holt of the woods—good night!" cried George. "This wind! No more'n a shower of rain all last week!"

They had left the ax outside, in a stump. With it, and with green boughs, and with brain and sinew, they fought the fire. The crushed shack and the section of the fallen tree that lay on it were out of their control in a minute; but by desperate efforts they kept the flames from spreading beyond the little clearing.

The wind fell to nothing. That helped, for the sparks went straight up and expired in the air; but the ruins of the shack, which were bone dry, and all of the big old spruce except about thirty feet of the trunk, burned to red embers. Dawn was among the trees by that time.

The two men had lost their rifles, their blankets, their provisions—everything except the ax. They were exhausted, slightly blistered, and very hungry; and yet they dared not leave that smoking mass for fear that a wind might rise and bring its heart of fire to life again. They drank and washed at the spring.

"If we had something to lug water in, we'd soon be done with it," said George. "There's some old pails down at the camp. If I had my boots, I'd go fetch them. There's some tinned stuff there, too. Wish we'd come up in a canoe, like I wanted to!"

"We're darned lucky to have our socks, if you ask me," returned Charlie. "If you're afraid of your feet, I'll go fetch the buckets and the beans. It's all soft footin' twixt here and there."

He went. He was back in a little better than three hours, with a couple of

tin pails, four cans of pork and beans, and an old frying pan. They did not have to light a fire to heat up their breakfast.

Breakfast disposed of, they set to work with the pails, and by noon the deepest and hottest coal in that smoldering ruin was black and dead. Prodding among the wet ashes and cinders with long poles, they found the barrels of their rifles. Soon after that George said:

"Here's something else."

"What you got there?" asked Charlie.

"Looks like bones. Sure it's bones—an' big ones, too!"

"Bones? You're dead right. Now that's queer. There wasn't anything in the shack—no dead animal or anything like that, or we'd 'a' smelled it, even if we hadn't seen it."

"Wonder could there 'a' been something up in that old spruce!"

"Maybe so, but it don't seem likely." Charlie MacLush stood as if in deep thought, staring down at the charred bones. His subconscious mind suspected the truth, perhaps, but only a hint of a vibration of that suspicion reached the front of his brain—only enough to give him an uneasy feeling that some illuminating idea or enlightening memory was eluding him. He shook his head.

"No, it's a puzzle to me," he said.

"Sizable bones," said George. "Somebody might 'a' cached a side of deer meat on the roof and forgot it. What do we care, with nigh on to thirty miles to hoof it and no boots to our feet?"

The man who was known by the name of Racer at Bundel's Bridge and on Gunwad Brook has never been seen in that country since his parting with George Bundel to go back to camp for the pack he said he had left on the woodpile. The Bundels and the MacLushes have forgotten him. Mr. Smith, the detective, has given up all hope of ever snapping bracelets on him. If he should happen to be dead, killed by a chance shot—well, peace to his ashes!

## BOLZANO

A CITY filled with echoes of past things—

Legends of Laurin, King of the Elves. The mute

Medieval church tower. Walther with his lute,

Hands crossed upon its strings.

*Lena Whittaker Blakeney*

# By the Light of Day

THE STORY OF A MAN WHO WANTED LIFE TO BRING HIM  
SOMETHING MUCH FINER AND BETTER THAN THE COM-  
MONPLACE THINGS IT BRINGS TO OTHER MEN

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

KIRBY lay stretched out on the sand, watching the driftwood fire he had built. The flame mounted steadily, this quiet night, sending out over the dark water a trembling path of ruddy light. Now and then a little rain of sparks fell, to die at once in the thick sand; and overhead a young moon swam, clear silver, in a sky without clouds.

He might have been alone on a desert island. Before him lay the calm summer sea, and all about him stretched the flat and empty beach. He liked this blank solitude—indeed, he needed it.

The tiny thread of smoke from his cigarette rose beside the column of smoke from the fire, like a sturdily independent spirit. His thoughts, too, were aloof, detached from the insistent current of other people's thoughts.

He had received a substantial rise in salary that morning.

"Now you ought to think about getting married," his sister had said, not for the first time.

He was thinking about it, but in a way that would have dismayed her. She was always introducing him to "nice girls," and growing a little annoyed with him because of his indifference.

"I don't see what fault you can find with *her*!" she would say, as if one of the "nice girls" was as good as another; and, in her heart, that was what she did think. She wanted only to see Kirby married and in a home of his own.

He kept his own counsel, for it was no use trying to tell his sister. Let her go on trying to snare him, to capture him, to bind him tight to the life that he so utterly rejected! He had seen it happen to other fellows he knew. He had watched them

fall in love, get married, and set up homes of their own, and had seen them grow harassed, preoccupied, sometimes bitter. There was his brother-in-law, for instance, complaining about the bills, talking of giving up his club, guilty and apologetic if he came in late. It was supposed to be comic, all this sort of thing, but Kirby did not see it so.

"If there's nothing better than that—" he thought.

When he was younger he had been sure that there was something better. In books, in operas, in plays, he had caught the echo of a sublime thing, and he had believed that it was every man's birthright—a love passionate and honest and beyond measure generous. He had meant to wait for it; but, as he grew older, his faith died.

He did not see any such thing in actual life. He saw, instead, love that began beautifully and honestly, but ended in a suburban home and a thousand ignoble worries; and he would have none of that. If there was nothing better, then he would do without. He was doing well in business, and he would keep on doing better and better, and that would have to be enough.

He threw away his cigarette, clasped his hands under his head, and lay looking at the stars. Here on this beach, as a boy, he had played intensely serious games of Indians and pirates, always with a fire like this. Even now he could recapture something of the old thrill of wonder and expectancy, the feeling he had had that marvelous things were surely going to happen.

Well, they never had. Here he was, twenty-six, and assistant manager of the accounting department of a machine belt-  
ing company; a quiet, competent young



fellow with an air of businesslike reserve that disguised the moods of his exacting and sensitive spirit. He went to the office every day, he worked, he came home, he met those "nice girls." He talked to them and danced with them, and sometimes made love to them a little, out of politeness; and that was all there was.

And it wasn't enough. Out here, in the summer night, his restlessness grew intolerable. He wanted so much more—something stirring and lovely, something that would give to his work and his life a fine significance. So much more!

"I'd better go back now," he thought, and tried to pretend that this was a concession to his sister. But it was not; it was because he had grown too lonely. He got up, and was about to kick out the fire, to scatter it and stamp it out, when, far down the beach, he saw a little white figure coming toward him.

He stood still, curiously intent. He had grown to think that this was his own private territory, for hardly any one else came here, especially after dark; yet here was this little thing coming on resolutely.

It was a girl in a white dress—he could see that now. Her step made no sound upon the sand. There was no breeze to flutter her skirts. She was like a wraith, silent and dim.

Then, to his surprise, she turned directly toward him. There was a rise in the beach here, up from the edge of the sea, and she mounted it briskly.

"Excuse me," she said, in a serious little voice. "I just wanted to see the time."

Stretching out her arm toward the fire, she looked at her wrist watch.

"You'll have to come nearer," Kirby told her. "I'm sorry, but mine's stopped."

But she stood where she was.

"I saw your fire," she said. "I've been watching it as I came along. I do love fires on a beach!"

"Yes?" returned Kirby vaguely.

Her confident and friendly manner disconcerted him. He had never encountered a girl like this. There was something unreal about her, walking out of the dark, up to his fire, and beginning at once to talk to him, as if she knew and trusted him.

"Won't you sit down for a little while?" he asked, a little doubtfully.

"Thank you," she answered promptly, and, coming nearer, sat down on the sand, facing the sea.

"She ought to know better," thought Kirby. "She can't know what sort of fellow I might be."

He stood behind her, looking down at her. The firelight behind her threw her slight figure, sitting with her hands clasped about her knees, into sharp relief, but her face he could not see at all.

"Do you know," she said earnestly, "that pirates used to come here?"

"Pirates?" he echoed.

"Yes!" she said. "I read about it in a book from the library; and last summer I *think* I found a pirate's earring. Auntie said it was a curtain ring, but perhaps it wasn't."

An odd thrill ran through Kirby. Pirates! Easy to imagine them, on just such a night as this, landing in the cove below the rocks—swarthy, evil men, creeping up inch by inch, with knives between their teeth. They would leap upon him suddenly; there would be a desperate fight in the glare of the fire. Then the pirate chief would carry away the girl, and Kirby, the hero, would somehow escape from his bonds and swim after them, and save her.

She would know exactly how to behave in such circumstances, he felt sure. He felt sure, too, that if he were to suggest that they should "make believe" there were pirates here, she would immediately and seriously agree. She was like a little girl, like some playmate from his lost youth. In some queer way of her own she evoked for him the glamour of childhood—she and her pirate's earring!

He sat down beside her, and they began to talk. It no longer seemed to him a foolish and imprudent thing that she should have come to him like this. She had the unthinking independence that children have. She would go where she chose, and, if she was startled or distrustful, she would run away.

It made him happy that she should be here, this friendly little thing with her pretty voice.

"The fire's getting low!" she cried.

Springing up, she gathered an armful of wood to put on it. So did he, and they stood side by side, throwing in the sticks with nice care. The flames leaped up, and he saw her face—a small, pointed face framed in dark hair, which floated in silky threads, and lit up by big, shining dark eyes. It was like a face in a dream, so lovely that it almost took his breath away.

She sat down again, her head a little turned away from the blaze, and he could no longer see her face; but he remembered it. It was there before him in the dark, in all its vivid loveliness. He could not think of her as a playmate now. The magic evocation of childhood was gone; he was a man, and she was a young and beautiful woman. His content, his happiness, had vanished. He was troubled, almost dismayed.

"I've never seen any one like her!" he thought. "I didn't know there *was* any one like her; and for her to come to me like this!"

After all, wasn't it what he had been waiting for, just this glimpse of a lovely face, this clear and steady little voice in the dark, this utterly unexpected encounter in the firelight on the lonely beach?

She was still talking to him, with a sort of eagerness, but he scarcely listened now. It seemed to him that her voice had changed. Indeed, he could not hear or see her now. The fire was dying down, and she was no more than a little silhouette against the starlit sky; but in her place there was another—some one very beautiful and almost august, like the young Diana come to earth. The innocence and candor of her were sublime; she was fearless, of course, just as she was beautiful.

Kirby did not realize how long he had been silent, when she stopped speaking. Her voice still echoed in his ears, blended with the whisper of the sea. He sat beside her, lost in a reverie.

"This is how it ought to be," he thought. "This is just right—to have her come to me like this, and for her to *be* like this!"

He was roused by her getting up.

"I'll have to be going," she said.

"No!" said Kirby, rising, too. "Please don't!"

"But it's late."

She turned toward him, and he had another glimpse of her face and her shining, solemn dark eyes.

"Please don't!" he repeated.

"But, you see, I've got to," she explained. "I promised I'd be home by nine o'clock."

"I'll walk home with you."

"But—" she began. "I—I'd like you to, only—I think you'd better not, please." Then, as he was silent, she added, in distress: "I'm sorry—really I am," and held out her hand.

He took it. He might have known, by the clasp of that warm and sturdy little hand, that this was no goddess Diana whose feet were on the hilltops; but he would not know it. His heart beat fast, and his fingers tightened on hers.

"You'll let me see you again?" he said.

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "Yes, of course! Some other evening—but I've got to go now. Good night!"

She tried to draw her hand away, but he held it fast.

"Look here!" he said. "You can't go like this! I don't even know your name."

"It's Emmy—Emmy Richards," she told him.

"Mine's Alan Kirby. You'll let me come to see you?"

"Well, you see," she said, "I can't very well. I'm just visiting here."

"Then meet me somewhere."

She stood before him with her head bent. The fire was almost out, and it seemed to him that the world had grown dark and very still and a little desolate. It was as if something had gone—some warm and living presence. In his heart he was vaguely aware of what had happened. It was the dear, jolly little playmate who had gone, taking with her the innocent glamour of this hour, driven away by the note of ardor in his voice.

He was sorry and uneasy, but he would not stop.

"Won't you give me a chance?" he asked. "Let me see you again!"

"I will," she promised. "I'll come here again—some other evening—like this!"

He understood very well what she meant. She wanted to recapture the vanished charm, to come again in the same happy and careless way, to talk by the fire again; but he would not have it so.

"Look here!" he said. "Will you let me take you out to dinner to-morrow?"

She did not answer, but stood there with her head averted; and a fear seized him that was like anger.

"I don't want to bother you," he said curtly. "If you don't want to see me again—"

"Well, I—I do!" she cried unsteadily. "Only—"

He would go on.

"Then come to dinner with me to-morrow!"

"Oh, let's not!" she cried. "I never go out to dinner—with people."

He smiled to himself at that, yet it hurt him. Poor little playmate, so reluctant to leave her world of make-believe!

"Just with me?" he urged, coming close to her.

"Well, all right!" she said suddenly, with a sort of desperation. "All right, then—I will!"

"Where shall I meet you?"

"I don't know."

"The Pennsylvania Station—Long Island waiting room—at six?"

She drew her hand away.

"All right!" she said again. "Good night!"

"Good night!" he answered.

## II

HE stood beside what was left of his fire and watched her walking away, a swift, light little figure against so vast a horizon; and he felt very unhappy.

"What's the matter with me, anyhow?" he asked himself angrily. "It's no crime to ask a girl out to dinner, is it?"

He stamped out the last sparks and set off for his sister's house. He was surprised, when he drew near, to hear the phonograph still playing. It seemed to him that he had been gone so long, so far!

He crossed the lawn, went up on the veranda, and looked in at the window. They were still dancing in there. He saw that pretty little blond girl in her short, sleeveless white satin frock. There came before him the face of that other girl, seen only for a brief instant in the firelight—that little dark face with shining eyes.

"I love her!" he thought, with a sort of awe. "She's the girl I've always been waiting for. Emmy—little darling, wonderful Emmy—I love her!"

He could not endure to go in, to dance, to speak to any one else. He stayed out there in the dark garden, walking up and down, smoking, cherishing his dear vision.

After awhile the two girls who had been dancing, and whom his sister had invited specially on his account, came out, with two young fellows. Kirby stepped back into the shadow of the trees and waited until they had driven off, until he could no longer hear their gay voices.

He compared these girls with Emmy. She wore no paint or powder; he had not seen her dancing in a hot and brilliant room. She belonged to another world—a world of sea and open sky and firelight.

She was a creature with the free, fearless innocence of the Golden Age.

"I love her so!" he thought.

Nearly all of that long summer night he walked there in the garden, profoundly stirred by the great thing that had overtaken him. Before him was always the vision of her lovely face, filling his heart with tenderness and a troubled delight.

"I'm not good enough for her," he thought.

Without realizing it, he began to forget that he had smiled to himself at the dear, funny things she had said, to forget what a little young thing she was. What was in his mind now was a sort of goddess, beautifully kind, but austere and aloof—a woman to be worshipped. His humility was honest and fine and touching, but it was cruel, because there was no goddess girl like that. There was only little Emmy Richards, who was nineteen, and altogether human and liable to error.

He let himself into the house quietly, so that no one heard him. He did not want to talk to any one.

When he came downstairs the next morning, he was still anxious for silence, but his sister was not disposed to humor him.

"Where did you go last night?" she demanded.

How was he to answer that? He had gone into an enchanted world, and he had found his beloved!

"I took a walk along the beach," he said, briefly.

"A walk!" she cried. "You come here to visit me, and I ask people in to meet you, and you go off, without a word, and take a walk! I never heard of anything so selfish and hateful!"

Her indignation took him by surprise. It seemed to him the most preposterous thing that she should blame him for being with Emmy.

"I'm sorry," he said, though he really wasn't, and his sister knew it; but, looking at him, she saw that he was tired and troubled, and she held her tongue.

Kirby's work suffered that day because of his preoccupation with the problem of the evening before him. He was determined to offer something at least a little worthy of her. He had taken other girls out to dinner, but this was beyond measure different.

At last he thought of a restaurant he had seen advertised—a quiet, dignified place; and he went there, engaged a table, and ordered a wonderful little dinner. All the rest of the day he imagined how it was going to be, he and Emmy sitting at that table, softly lit by candles. He knew what he was going to say to her, and how she would look at him, with her shining, solemn eyes.

He came early to the waiting room and walked up and down, restless and anxious.

"She didn't want to come," he thought. "Perhaps she didn't like me."

A pretty girl sitting on one of the benches smiled at him, but he looked past her. Ten minutes late now! Of course, other girls were usually late, but Emmy was different—utterly different. He remembered her now with a sort of amazement—the innocent beauty of her face, the almost incredible charm of her dear friendliness.

"No one like her!" he thought.

And that was true. There was not, and never could be, any girl like the one that he, in his ardent, imperious young heart, had invented.

Suppose she didn't come at all?

"I'll find her!" he thought. "I know her name, and I'll find her. I won't lose her!"

He glanced around the waiting room again, and again he met the eyes of the pretty girl who had smiled at him before. No denying that she was pretty, but he was sternly uninterested. Let her smile!

This time, though, she rose from her seat, and made a step in his direction.

"She'll ask me some question about a train," thought Kirby.

He was a good-looking young fellow, and this sort of thing had happened to him before. At another time he might perhaps have been a little less severe. She was very pretty—a tall, slender girl in a very short frock, with a red hat pulled down over one eye. Her piquant little face was rouged and powdered. Kirby might have seen a sort of debonair charm about her, if he had not had in his heart the image of another face, so honest, so unspoiled, so very different!

He walked the length of the room, and when he came back he passed quite close to her. She smiled again—a tremulous, miserable, forlorn little smile. He stopped and stared at her.

"Look here!" he said. "You're not—are you—Miss Richards?"

"Yes, I am," she replied in a defiant and unsteady voice.

He could not speak for a moment, so bitter was his disappointment. She was not rare and wonderful; she was only a pretty, silly, painted little thing, like thousands of others.

"If only she hadn't come!" he thought. "If only I'd never seen her again! Then I could have gone on—"

He realized, however, that he had invited her to meet him, and that in common decency he must not let her see how he felt; so he smiled as politely as he could.

"Didn't recognize you at first," he said. "I'm sorry!"

That was all he could manage for the moment. She, too, was silent, with a set, strained smile on her lips.

"We can't stand here like this," he thought. "I've asked her to dinner!"

But he was not going to take this girl to the quiet little restaurant with candles on the table. That had been for the other girl—the grave, aloof, and beautiful one, who didn't exist.

"Come on!" he said briefly. "We'll get a taxi."

She followed him without a word, and he helped her into a cab.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't care," she answered.

Very well—if she didn't care, neither would he. He gave the driver an address and got in beside her.

"Like to dance?" he asked.

"I love it!"

Then this would be merely an evening like other evenings. He would dance with her, spend more money than he could afford, and then forget her. She was not different, after all. There never had been any girl like the one he had dreamed of, or invented, last night in the firelight.

"What a fool I was!" he thought.

He wanted to laugh at himself, and could not; it hurt too much. He so badly needed the girl who did not exist—that honest, friendly, lovely little thing with the innocent glamour of childhood still about her. He glanced at the real one, sitting beside him. By the passing lights he could see her face, which was turned toward the window.

"She doesn't know anything about me,"



he thought. "She doesn't care. All she wants is a 'good time'!"

He took out his cigarette case and tendered it to her.

"No, thank you," she said.

"I will, if you don't mind," said Kirby, and that was all he did say.

He sat back in his corner, smoking, lost in his own thoughts. It was a long drive, for he was taking her to a road house just outside the city—a third-rate sort of place.

"But she said she didn't care," he thought.

### III

THEY went on in a stream of other cars, like a flotilla of lighted ships, in the mild summer night. He hated the whole thing—the dust, the reek of gasoline, the tawdriness and staleness of the undertaking. He had wanted something better. His ardent spirit had groped toward an ideal, and, when he thought he had found it, it was only this!

It was as if he had gone into a dim temple, ready to worship, and suddenly a flood of garish light had come, and he saw that it was not a temple at all, but a sorry palace of pleasure. He lit another cigarette from the first one.

"I'm—sorry I came!" said the girl beside him, in a shaky voice.

He turned, but it was too dark to see her.

"I beg your pardon?" he said, very much taken aback.

"I didn't want to come," she went on.

"I told you, but you *made* me, and now—and now—you see—"

He quite realized that he had been behaving very ill, not even trying to talk to her. After all, it wasn't her fault. She couldn't know what a fool he had been.

"I don't see at all," he said. "I—I'm very glad you're here."

The feebleness of that made him ashamed, but he drew closer to her and took her hand. She kept her head averted, but she made no objection.

"That's what she expects," he thought bitterly. "She expects me to make love to her. All right!"

So he put his arm about her shoulders, and made up his mind to say to her the things he had said to other girls; and because he was young, and she was very pretty, some of his bitterness vanished.

"You're the sweetest little thing!" he said. "The moment I saw you—"

She pulled away from him with a violence that astounded him.

"Don't talk to me like that!" she cried.

"It's—horrible!"

"Sorry!" said Kirby stiffly, and withdrew to his corner; but the sound of a sob made him bend toward her, filled with a reluctant contrition. "Look here!" he continued. "I didn't mean—"

"I just—bumped my head," she said.

"That's all; but I'd rather go home now."

"But we've just got here," objected Kirby. "Better have some dinner first."

He got out of the cab and held out his hand to her, but she jumped cut unaided and walked to the foot of the steps. As he turned and saw her standing where the lights of the portico shone full upon her, a queer, reluctant tenderness swept over him. Her coat was a little too big for her. Her red hat was pushed back, showing more of her candid brow, and her dark hair was ruffled. She looked so weary and angry, and so young! Even if she was not what he wanted her to be, she was somehow dear to him.

"Look here!" he said. "Look here! Let's have a nice evening, anyhow!"

She responded instantly to his tone. For the first time that night he saw in her some likeness to the lost little playmate.

"All right—let's!" she cried.

He led the way to the glass-enclosed veranda where small tables were set out. The orchestra was playing, and through the long windows they could see the ballroom where couples were dancing.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said.

Kirby did not think so. He was regretting that he had brought her here. They sat down at a table, and he took up the menu.

"What do you like?" he asked.

"Oh, anything!" said Emmy.

She was looking about her with a sort of rapture.

"Yes!" he thought. "This is the sort of thing she likes!"

And again his disappointment came back, sharper than ever. He thought of the dinner he had meant to have, by candlelight, in that quiet restaurant, with the girl who didn't exist. Was there never to be anything like that for him, nothing fine and beautiful and stirring?

"Well, I'm here, and I've got to make the best of it," he thought. "What will you have to drink?" he asked aloud.

"To drink?" she repeated, looking at him anxiously. "Oh, let's not!"

Kirby ordered two cocktails.

"You can't come to a place like this and not order anything to drink," he explained when the waiter had gone. "Everybody does."

"Then I wish we hadn't come here," said she.

The cocktails came, and he drank both of them.

"Care to try a dance?" he asked.

"No, thank you," replied Emmy.

She was looking about her with a different vision now. All the light was gone from her face. Evidently she didn't find the place lovely now. Kirby himself became more conscious of the loud voices, the hysteric laughter, the ugly disorder about him. He was sorry that he had brought her here. He was ashamed of himself, and he did not like being ashamed of himself.

"You said you loved dancing," he suggested.

"Not now," said Emmy. "It's getting late. If you don't mind, I'd like to go home."

"Just as you please," replied Kirby.

They finished the dinner in silence. Kirby paid the preposterous bill, and they went out to the taxi.

"You needn't bother to come with me," said Emmy politely.

"No bother at all," returned Kirby, equally polite. "I'll see you safely to the station."

"I'm going to a friend's house in the city."

He got in beside her. He sat as far from her as he could, and neither of them spoke one word during all that long drive. In his heart he felt a great remorse and regret, but he would not let her know that.

But when the cab stopped at the address she had given him, and he helped her out, he could no longer maintain that stubborn, miserable silence.

"I'm sorry," he told her. "I didn't mean it to be like this."

"It doesn't matter," said Emmy. "Good night!"

#### IV

KIRBY stood where he was until she had gone up the steps and into the house. Then he paid the cab and set off on foot for the Pennsylvania Station. When he got there

he found that there was an hour to wait for the next train, and again he set off to walk about the streets, his hands in his pockets, his pipe between his teeth. All the time her voice echoed in his ears—her quiet little voice.

"Good Lord!" he said to himself angrily. "It's no tragedy! I asked the girl out to dinner, I tried to give her a good time, and that's all there is to it."

But still her voice echoed in his heart, and still he felt that bitter ache of regret. Let him walk as far as he would, he could not escape from it.

"She was unhappy," he thought, and the thought pained him. He went on walking, and when he got back to the station he found that he had missed his train. It was the last for that day; the next one left at four o'clock in the morning.

He didn't really care. He went to an all-night restaurant and had coffee and bacon and eggs. Then he strolled back to the waiting room where he had met her, and sat down there. He had the place to himself; there was nothing to disturb his reflections.

"The trouble was," he said to himself, "that I was disappointed."

And, like an audible response, the words shaped themselves in his mind:

"Well, what about her?"

He had never been more unhappy in all his life. He dozed a little during those long hours; but whether he slept or waked, he was conscious all the time of that bitter ache of regret.

There was an air of unreality about the early morning train. It was almost empty, and such passengers as there were seemed to Kirby to be very incongruous. For instance, where could that neat little gray-haired woman be going at such an hour? Or that Italian with a fierce mustache, who carried a square package wrapped in newspaper?

The world outside, seen through the train window, had the same unreal air. It was still dark, but this was not the serene darkness of night; it was, he thought, more like the dim silence of an auditorium before the curtain goes up. There was a feeling in the air that something tremendous was about to happen, and that a myriad creatures waited.

He felt the thrill of that expectancy himself. The window beside him was open, and the wind blew in his face with a di-

vine freshness. He could see the trees and the sharp lines of roofs, as if they had stepped forward out of the night's obscurity. There came a drowsy chirping; the curtain had begun to rise.

Then all the birds began to wake, and the chorus swelled and swelled. The insects were chirping, and he could hear the lusty crow of barnyard cocks—such little creatures, raising so sublime and tremendous a "Laudamus."

"The sun's coming up," said Kirby to himself.

When he got out of the train the sky was gray, with only a thin veil before the face of the coming wonder. There was a single taxi at the station, and he hesitated, because two women had got out of the train after him; but one of the women set off briskly along the village street and the other one took the road, so he got into the cab.

A moment later he had passed the woman on the road. There was light enough to see her now.

"Stop!" he cried, but the driver did not hear him. He banged on the glass. "Stop! I want to get out!"

Giving the man his last dollar bill, Kirby jumped out and turned back.

She was coming toward him steadfastly, a straight and slender figure in a dark dress and drooping black hat. He could see that the dress was shabby, that her shoes were dusty and a little worn. Her face was pale, and there was a smudge on her forehead.

"Emmy!" he cried.

She stopped short. A hot color rose in her cheeks, and ebbed away, leaving her still paler.

"Emmy!" he said uncertainly. "You look—you've changed!"

"Well, no," she answered, in that serious little voice. "You see, I'd borrowed those clothes from a girl at the office. I stopped at her house to leave them, and I missed the train." She paused a moment. "I'm sorry I ever wore them," she said; "only she's been so awfully dear

and kind to me, and she said she wanted to make me look nice."

"You did look nice!" said Kirby.

He felt a sort of anguish at the sight of her. Why hadn't he known, all the time, that she was like this? She was innocent and honest and lovely—and he had so grossly offended against her! He had taken her to that third-rate place; he had been surly, obstinate, utterly blind; and, worst of all, he had judged her so arrogantly!

"I'm so sorry!" he said. "You don't know—I didn't mean—"

"I'm sorry, too," she said. "I never went out like that before, and I wish I hadn't done it."

They stood facing each other, standing in the middle of the empty road. She was downcast, but he was looking at her with amazement. She was *not* that little flip-pant painted thing, like a thousand other girls! How could he ever have thought so? Neither was she the wise, aloof young goddess. She was just Emmy, rather shabby and very tired, with a smudge on her forehead.

"You don't know," he said, "how beautiful you are—in the daylight!"

Again the color rose in her cheeks, and as swiftly receded.

"I've got to hurry," she exclaimed, with that earnest politeness of hers. "You see, my little brother's taking examinations to-day, and I promised I'd make pancakes for his breakfast."

"Oh, Emmy!" he said, and began to laugh.

She smiled herself, reluctantly.

"Well, I did promise," she declared.

An immense happiness filled him. He knew now! He understood why those other fellows wanted to get married and set up homes! Bills and worries and even quarrels were not tragic, and not basely comic. They simply didn't matter. The one great thing was this infinite tenderness. He did not want to worship a goddess any more; he wanted to take care of Emmy.

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### THE DEAREST PATH

You have wandered, and I have wandered  
Far afield over loam and foam,  
And the dearest pathway, when all is pondered,  
Is the one that guides our footsteps home.

Clinton Scollard

# Orchid in the Corn

JUST BECAUSE A GIRL IS SLENDER AND DAINTY AND HAS  
PRETTY HANDS, IS IT SAFE TO CONCLUDE THAT  
SHE IS NOTHING BUT A CLINGING VINE?

By Carroll K. Michener

CATCHING the stem of a pink blossom between her lips, the girl with the jug stepped fastidiously over a carpet of cut clover. As if looking for four-leaves, she kept her eyes upon the long, tufted swaths, withering and fragrant in the wake of the mower; and because of this it was not until she had passed the flank of the off Clydesdale that she seemed to notice the pair of longish, unfamiliar legs dangling from the machine's saddle.

The legs slid to the ground, with the feet at military attention, and the girl's vision traveled upward over a pair of blue denim overalls to a khaki shirt; thence to a "V" of sunburned throat; and finally to Quintus Cobb's smile.

Quint had observed her from afar. The first glint of her strawberry-colored hat had caught his eye as she emerged from the well house, eighty rods away. The near Clydesdale had whinnied and then cocked one ear forward toward her, bending the other backward to attend Quint's exclamation.

"What ho?" was the young man's audible reaction. "The farmer's daughter!" Then, *sotto voce*, came his wonted soliloquy upon encountering any interesting girl: "I wonder if she'd do!"

As she stood before him, confirming each perverse, extraordinary detail of her appearance, he saw that unless his diagnosis was in error, pleasant violence had been done to all the nut-brown preconceptions he had ever entertained concerning rural maidenhood. She was diminutive, and seemed to be modeled for the domestic dalliance of an apartment gas plate rather than for the daily endurance contest of a farmhouse kitchen. There was nothing about her fingers, insecurely supporting the

jug by its clumsy ear, that would have betrayed frequent immersion, or even occasional immersion, in the suds of dish pan or mop bucket. Her nails were manicured, and shone with buffing.

Quint sighed. She wouldn't do for a farmer's wife, he feared. From the agricultural viewpoint, the best that could be said of her was that she had a voice that made him think of apple butter, country style, and creamy rural pumpkin pie.

"Where's father?"

The clover fell from her lips as she spoke, but left in them its identical color. Her skin, Quint observed, was coral-tinted, and as fragile and translucent as a vase of egg-shell china. It was entrancing, but it wouldn't rime with plucking raspberries under a summer sun.

"If you mean Mr. Kemp," answered Quint, "he's back there in the barn, gassing with the boss."

Her lips framed an unabashed "O," slightly oblate with further interrogation.

Quint explained. Doing so, he eyed askance the tall heels of her red-strapped sandals and the exquisite molding of her silk-stockinged ankles, truncated just above the arrow points of hand-embroidered clocks by the nether hem of her skirt. Engaging but perplexing details, these! The skirt, it was true—a tube of starched gingham—was more appropriately agricultural; and yet it was too crisply, startlingly pink. The flappy, rosetted hat was suggestive of tea on a velvet lawn.

"I'm working for Mr. Hanks—Center-ville man—sells all kinds of insurance," said Quint. "I drive his car and work while he talks. Doesn't leave a farmer much of an alibi, you see, when there's some one to take his place in the field while



he argues with my boss. I've been frying here on this mower since about nine o'clock, getting thirstier every minute. Al-low me!"

Quint swept from his head a sartorial confection that seemed to have been borrowed from an obliging scarecrow, and reached for the moisture-beaded jug. To his surprise, the girl retreated nimbly.

"It's for father," she protested.

There was, he believed, a frown between her brows. She was looking down at the pretty pink and white loop of her fingers through the handle of the jug. A small pollution of harness grease was visible on one of them. Evidently, Quint concluded with a sense of polite but hardly profound contrition, he had been too effectively swift with his soiled grasping, or she had been coquettishly slow with her withdrawal.

Even as he devised a word of precisely adequate apology, the frown—if it was one—vanished. She turned away, hesitated, and then tucked the jug under a tuft of hay.

"Of course," she said over her shoulder, "if father's at the barn, he can get a drink from the well house."

With that she was gone, apparently unaware of Quint's profession of gratitude—an utterance quenched in a long, gurgling sigh at the mouth of the jug.

Appeased, he followed her with his eyes until the mincing sandals were lost beyond a screen of tall weeds, until the apple orchard had swallowed the scarlet lightning of her hat. Then he sighed, spoke sharply to the Clydesdales, and was off on another clattering round of the ten-acre field.

No, he reflected, she wouldn't do—she wouldn't do at all; especially when there was that fine big girl at the first stop of the morning to consider—the place with the silos and the tractors. A splendid farm that, and the farmer's daughter was splendid, too. The Percheron type, Quint catalogued her honestly and without shame—a strapping figure of a woman.

This was a term reflecting the convictions and the dictions of Quint's father, who was a corner grocer—a soft-handed scion of New England farmers starved into other trades by the niggardly, rock-ribbed soil upon which they had clung to the very margin of indigence.

"If you are going to be a farmer," his father always insisted, with rather a doubting emphasis, "you'll have to look for a

strapping wench of a woman. No jazz chicken would stand the gaff. She'd drive you out or drive you poor."

The shimmer of heat was dizzying, and Quint's ears ached with the machine's uproar. Occasional faint whorls of breeze moved like infant tornadoes over the rolling field, playfully twisting the standing clover, but these did little to temper the breath of approaching noon. His cheeks reddened under the flapping brim of his hat.

Pulling the Clydesdales about at the near corner of the field, he "breathed" them again. As their heaving flanks quieted, he glanced toward the barnyard for some hint of midday retreat.

The weather-worn vane of the windmill, standing out pertly from its wooden tower, made him think of the tail feathers of a cock sparrow. The wheel spun fitfully till it was a blurred disk, and he could imagine the flow of cool liquid from the pump's nozzle into a wooden tank beside the well house; but he wasn't thirsty. He had the jug, under the hayrick. That was only at the fringe of his mind, inside which danced a pair of frivolous, red-strapped sandals, successfully disputing the center of consciousness with that buxom girl on the other farm, and maliciously mocking at the charted matrimonial requirements of his agricultural career.

He was, he reminded himself, a trained farmer in search of a farm. This job with the insurance man was both meal ticket and exploration, but it was principally the latter. When he found a place that appealed to his talents, he would stop—and would stay till the farm was his. That was the sort of campaign he had mapped out for himself.

Certainly, from that point of view, his time here was being wasted. He should have looked longer at those fine silos, the tractors, the Holstein beauties—although, when he came to think of it, there wasn't much left to be done there, even with superscience.

Of Nathan Kemp's farm exactly the opposite was true. It cried aloud for agricultural reform. The half dozen cows grazing in the adjacent pasture were of mixed, indeterminate strain. There was evidence of quackgrass along the margins of the fields, and rank kingweed grew in a gullied depression that had been neglectfully allowed to cut diagonally, like a scar,

across a small planting of corn. The orchard, behind the house, was but a thicket of dead, fungus-covered trunks.

Mr. Kemp, it was clear, was a farmer of the old school. His place was shabby; and nowadays, Quint was convinced, a farm had to be conducted skillfully, with attention to details, and with more energy than ever had been the case before, if you expected to make money from it.

There was no more easy ravishing of a virgin soil. The despoiling period of American farming was over. You got from the ground, now, exactly what you put into it; and there couldn't be loose ends—like, for instance, the half dozen posts separating clover field and cow pasture. These had decayed in the ground, and were sagging against the wire. There might be cows in the clover before long, with barb-lacerated udders.

Beyond the pasture was a wood lot, a cool retreat of hard maples, poplars, and elms, but through its very center was a great gash of tangled, fallen timbers. A tornado, Quint concluded, must have passed there, and its ruin had never been cleared away.

As for the farm buildings, they were a dejected lot—three or four rambling, sagging, unpainted sheep sheds and the dilapidated barn. Sheep were all right, of course, but there was more money in hogs.

In one corner of the milking yard stood the ruin of a winter stock shelter—a makeshift affair topped by a crazy roofing of last year's straw. Its sides had been eaten away by cattle, exposing a gaunt skeleton of unbarked poles. Beside the barn, overflowing from a pole lean-to, Quint had seen a strange motley of corroded implements—a corn plow with rusty blades and broken shafts; a sway-backed democrat wagon with wheels dished and felloes shrunk from the rims; a half dismembered reaper.

The house was a small, ugly structure, belonging to the dark ages of rural American architecture. Quint had noticed its dingy green paint and narrow, scant-eaved, unwholesome aspect. The barn would have made a better dwelling.

Not far from the house, under the stark branches of a crab tree, there was a log cabin, and behind it a fragment of rail fence, half hidden by sumac and lilacs.

What had that exquisite, implausible, doll-like thing—the girl with the pink fingers—to do with all this? To come upon

her in such a setting was like finding an exotic orchid blooming among the corn.

## II

NATHAN KEMP's voice sounded from the barn door:

"Dinner's ready!"

Quint unhooked the tugs with alacrity, wary of irritable hoofs. The off Clydesdale, he had observed, was a jumpy, distempered brute, badly broken to harness, and probably needing a veterinary's diagnosis.

At table there were but four places, amply accounted for by the Kemps, the insurance man, and himself. Where, oh, where, was the pink and white one? Had she, after all, been only a mirage shimmering from heat waves and the perfume of cut clover?

Quint, sitting opposite, admired the single wisp of reddish hair plastered wetly across Nathan Kemp's shining carapace—looking, indeed, as if it had been combed with a sponge.

Mrs. Kemp seemed to be of a faded period. She was sparse in the calico apron, and her thin hair was braided into a meager knot—she would have called it a pug, Quint supposed. She made him think of sage tea, tomato preserves, blackroot tonic, gilded milkweed, and the poetry of Will Carleton. Somewhere about the place, he was sure, there would be tufts of ribbon grass and a catnip bed.

Nathan Kemp listened with patience as the eloquence of the insurance agent ran on unabated. It seemed to Quint as if an invisible garment of weariness, a tunic of outworn efficiency, hung from the farmer's stooped shoulders.

"There's no use, Hanks—you couldn't even sell me cyclone insurance; and if I don't miss my guess we've been having some real tornado weather ever since the Fourth. There's one whips past here about every summer."

"Must have been a close call," Quint ventured, "that time the wood lot caught it."

"So you noticed? That was a queer one—picked up a barn here and a barn there, and left houses standing only a few rods away. What I always say about those things is that if they're going to get you, they will, and it'd take more than a scrap of insurance policy to stop 'em."

"Right enough!" commented the oleag-

inous Mr. Hanks. "It doesn't matter a bit how you're taken off—flattened by a blast of wind, walloped by a mule, bitten by a hawg—all's the same to you when it's over; but it's real tough on your heirs if you leave nothing to pay the undertaker or the inheritance tax."

"Heirs?"

"Your wife and daughter, Mr. Kemp. Now let me see—a twenty-thousand-dollar endowment, paid up, dividends accruing, would yield an income, say—"

"Euphonia'll have the farm," Mr. Kemp interrupted. "Sybil, she has no use for an income—not from me, anyway. She earns one." This, judged by his tone, laid bare a sensitive spot. "We made the mistake of sending her to college," he went on, "and of course that put queer notions in her head. The old place here doesn't look right to her, she says. Can you imagine that, Mr. Hanks? Wants to chop down trees, tear down the house, and landscape the front yard. I suppose she'd turn the place into one of these newfangled summer resorts if she had her way about it."

"Now, Nathan!" interceded Euphonia Kemp. Turning to her guests, she explained: "Sybil's got a fine job in Chicago. She's secretary to an editor—a farm paper editor. She's just gone back from her vacation—took the bus to Centerville. There's a train late this afternoon. Of course, we're feeling a bit blue now that she's gone."

Quint fancied something of a blueness upon his own particular firmament; but it was solace to reflect that she wouldn't have done, anyway—she wouldn't have done at all.

Hanks, it seemed, was moved to offer condolence.

"Too bad!" he said, easing his excessively nourished body until the chair creaked in protest. "Hard to keep the young folks on the farm."

"What are we going to do?" complained Mr. Kemp. "What am I going to do with these two hundred acres, after Euphonia and I are done? Finest farm land in Minnesota, but Sybil won't want it. She wouldn't live on a farm."

No, thought Quint, she wouldn't want to live here. She wouldn't live on any farm, probably, even if she *would* do.

Hanks was droning on, solemnly judicial:

"I don't refer to your daughter, Mr. Kemp, but the young folks nowadays

haven't the right stuff in 'em. No gumption—no git up and git. They know they want something, maybe, but they don't know what it is."

A quiet sentence from Mrs. Kemp seemed to startle him.

"They want to make life more beautiful," she said simply.

Hanks looked puzzled, then nettled.

"Beautiful, Mrs. Kemp? They hate soiling their fingers with real work—that's what you mean, I guess. Especially the girls—they're fair weather people, all right when the sun shines, maybe, but no good in the rain—no good in a storm."

He seemed to let himself down a notch, to some more expedient and certainly less controversial plane.

"No!" he resumed. "The old stock's playing out—the pioneers, I mean. We won't see anything like 'em again. Mold's broken, I suppose. That cabin back there—you were born and raised in it, weren't you? And I'll gamble you or your father drove an ox team all the way West from around Indiana. Imagine the younger generation, with all its jazzing and necking and hip-flasking, running against a game like that!"

There was a gloomy nod of confirmation from Nathan Kemp. The insurance agent moistened his lips and screwed them up into a smile. Too much umbrageous conversation dampened business. Clouds like these required skillful puffing away.

"But there's a funnier side of the picture, Mr. Kemp. Good farmers are flocking into town to become poor motor mechanics and bond salesmen, all right, but there's a *vice versa*. No use to expect cobblers, these days, sticking to their lasts; and right here in our midst you'll find a horrible example."

The paunch of Mr. Hanks stirred gelatinously. Under his derisive regard, coupled with the others' scrutiny, Quint felt in his face a vivid reflection of the tablecloth's checkered red.

"We have with us," resumed the garulous loud-speaker, "Mr. Quintus Cobb. Diploma, State farm school—'by these presents'—that sort of thing. Capable, it says, of growing anything agricultural, from chinch bugs, probably, to string beans. Born in a flat, with an Elevated train dashing madly past the window. Been within sound of one, I should think, for most of his life. He ought to run a pool hall, or

an all-night restaurant; but instead of that he's gone and had himself postgraduated as a high-class farmer!"

The amused Mr. Hanks laughed, but his outburst had no echo.

"Seems to know something about horses," conceded Mr. Kemp.

Mrs. Kemp, with a still more practical sympathy, urged upon Quintus another wedge of her rhubarb pie.

"Oh, that's all right," Hanks hastened to amend. "He knows horses, and he knows farming. He's worked for me ever since he got that aforesaid diploma. He tackles anything that comes along; but the funny thing is this—he's a farmer without a farm. Haven't a nickel of capital, have you, son? No chance of his getting a farm of his own—see what I'm driving at?"

Out on the front veranda, with dinner over, Quint was aware of a musty fragrance. He was right—there was a catnip bed, a dragged patch of it beside the porch, choking out the petunias with which it competed in the dry, ashy soil; and a rusty Maltese wallowed there, uttering ecstatic cries.

Drowsy from food and the stagnant, light-steeped air, he made imaginary changes in the scene before him. His fancy uprooted those gnarled, senile apple trees and replaced them with a younger orchard. A colony of beehives would stand under his rows of greenings. There was this pesky catnip, of course, all over the place—a mass of it beside the log cabin. Hard to get rid of that! Well, let it stay—at worst it would be forage for the bees.

But other members of the genus weed would have to go—mullein, burdock, ragweed, plantain. Whole tribes of them were riotous about the yard. He had no particular animosity for weeds—they were the camp followers of man, crowding about him like poor relatives, springing up wherever he set foot. They were the tagging, wagging dogs of the vegetable kingdom; but there could, of course, be more than enough of them.

Across the road he tried to visualize a ten-acre truck patch, miraculously effacing a rusty, thin-stooled forty of spring wheat. Why was it so difficult to persuade these older farmers that there might be as much profit in one acre of garden truck as in ten of small grain?

Barberry! There must be some of that lurking among those tangled blackberry

and currant bushes along the rail fence, breathing up rust spores unto tallest heaven. All that ought to be cleared out, to make way for a plot of strawberries.

As for the log cabin—well, let that be. Mrs. Kemp might like it, and he would be willing to do a good deal for that kindly, old-fashioned soul. He could see through its open door a rusted cook stove and a kettle, used, probably, for washing, or for the making of soft soap.

Those cedars, white pines, and balsams in the front yard, whispered of graveyards and ghostly generations. There ought to be a flower garden where they stood. Quintus could see it—next summer—a carnival of color, fringed by young birches, with an elm shading the porch, and a row of butter-nuts by the road. Scarlet verbenas, rose-pink mallow—Sybil would like those—

He started. Here was his imagination running away with him, as it did when he straddled a corn plow, yielding to the mental release that he found in the mechanical monotony of his task. Besides, Sybil wouldn't do, even if she should come back. He'd better get her out of his mind.

Impatiently he looked up at Hanks, asleep against a porch pillar, his mouth open, his puffy face purplish. A faint cheeping of insects pulsed in the torpid air.

Quint could hear Nathan Kemp, at the barn door, uttering a patient "Whoa!" to the Clydesdales. Uneasy hoofs, thudding against the packed earth of the barnyard, spoke of fly-pestered shanks.

Suddenly there came a louder "Whoa!" and a rattle of disorder. Even before reaching the corner of the house, Quint felt certain of what was the trouble. That off horse—flies—an irritable, lashing hoof—

Mr. Kemp, in pained bewilderment, was dragging himself away from the brute's infuriated heels.

"Your leg, isn't it?" Quint asked.

"Broken, I guess."

Mrs. Kemp, fluttering from the kitchen door, assumed generalship. Under her direction—largely, indeed, by her own effort—Nathan Kemp was lifted to a convenient segment of planking and carried to the horsehair couch that stood in the living room.

Hanks lingered ineffectually. He would stay, he insisted, until the arrival of the doctor. There was an excellent insurance argument in the accident, but he would not press it—could not, in delicacy. He



watched as his agricultural assistant led away the whinnying, impatient Clydesdales.

Quint, momentarily, had the impulse to take them to the waiting mower, which looked hotter than ever in the afternoon sun. Instead, he halted them in their stalls, removed the harness, and hung it carefully away, pausing to slap soothingly the neck of the fly-angered animal that had injured its owner.

He wondered how Nathan Kemp would manage. Hired men were difficult to find. Doubtless the neighbors would do what they could, but this hardly gave assurance that Mrs. Kemp would not bear the brunt of the chores—would not have these horses to manage and the cows to milk.

Hanks, waving to him from the car, seemed to have changed his mind about waiting. Quint moved toward him, reluctantly at first, and then with sudden decision.

"I'm afraid," he announced, "you'll have to go on without me."

Apoplectic pinkness suffused the countenance of Mr. Hanks, and then subsided. He heaved into the driver's seat with a grunt, and pressed the starter.

"No use arguing with you, I suppose. Had sort of an idea," he said, "you'd be up to something like this!"

### III

THE air was sultry, and before long there would probably be thunderclouds blustering up from the horizon in the burlesque of a summer storm. Waiting at the station in Centerville, Quint produced curtains and chains from beneath the back seat of the car. Then, idling, he began to wonder about Sybil.

Would she do, now, any better than before? Obviously not, everything considered. She hadn't come home for Christmas, but had spent the holidays with friends in the city. Now she was returning for the first time in a year. It had been July when she left; the month again was July.

Quint had been hoping that somehow his first judgment of her would prove to have been harsh. He had wanted, it seemed, to find her a little less fragile, a trifle more material to an agricultural setting. Her hands, as she relinquished her bag at the steps of the Pullman, were not quite those yesterday's rose petals caressing the jug handle. They appeared to have

been put to some recent reddening and chastening avocation; but this would be golf, probably, or it might even be the laundering of her own stockings and blouses.

Of what she wore he was not specifically conscious, except that he missed the sandals with their red straps. On the whole, and aside from the detail of clothes, he had to come to this conclusion—she was approximately unchanged. She wouldn't do!

Audibly Quint sighed. Still, he argued, there might be some place for her in the young garden fringed with birches, between the old elm shading the porch and the row of butternuts by the road. Scarlet verbena, rose-pink mallow, California poppies, were growing there—Sybil might care for those. He could think of her among them as an exquisite porcelain figure, a Dresden doll statuette.

Her glance, interrogative, had embraced the car.

"Yours?" she seemed to ask.

"Belongs to the company," he confessed.

With a sweep of his cap he dusted the gilt lettering on the body of the car, clarifying for her the legend of "Arcadia Farms, Inc."

"That's your father and me. You've heard something about it, of course."

"Too much," she laughed. "All I've heard from mother for the past twelve months has been you, and all I've heard from father has been Arcadia Farms. You must have hypnotized them. Now they've exposed me to both you and the company at once. What have you done with them? Why didn't they come?"

Quint, evasively murmuring something about a surprise, swung to his place at the wheel and glanced appraisingly at the sky. There was an ominous thickness in the southwest, visible through a screen of sighing, apprehensive cottonwoods.

Out on the graveled open road he tilted the wind shield so that a flood of air poured upon Sybil's hot cheeks, whipping the tangled, curled ends of her hair. She relaxed against the back of the seat, evidently weary. This troubled him. Could she be as frail as she was diminutive?

They had, it seemed, little to say. Sybil was absorbed in the rapid drama of familiar countryside. Quint drifted into silent observance of the umbrageous sky.

No thunderclouds, curiously, were yet visible; there was only an immense opaque-

ness, into which the sun had been absorbed. This was oppressive, brooding the indeterminate. Quint derived from it a vague sense of irritation, as he would under a condition of nervous tension or of physical disorder. It was as if something brittle and without equilibrium hovered in that towering atmospheric wall looming imperceptibly closer, building and buttressing itself more densely before an impending fall. There was a breathless expectancy upon the landscape. Houses, trees, cattle, had about them some uneasy, indefinable anticipation.

Quint roused himself from this obsession. Smiling, he stopped the car at the summit of a rise in the straight road. He turned to Sybil. The sweep of his arm across the wheel indicated a scene that she would find familiar and yet curiously strange. That cluster of buildings, less than a quarter of a mile away, centered among manicured green fields, was the Kemp homestead.

"Arcadia," he murmured, lingering upon the word.

There was more change in it, he knew, than merely the unpainted timbering of a new barn—more, even, than the absence of those funereal evergreens in the front yard. A spacious, smiling garden lay across the road from the house, red paint crowned new posts at one end of the pasture, and tree trunks were corded where the decrepit orchard had stood; but there was something beyond all this. Quint was certain that she would feel it—an invisible alteration, as if the old fields exhibited new energy, reflected an unwonted touch.

Half a dozen black and white registered Holsteins—he had bought as many as the bank would finance—browsed in the pasture; and this, he knew, was the keynote. There was an atmosphere of quality about the place, a thoroughbred essence that seeped into the whole.

Sybil became suddenly articulate.

"I've always been at father to do something like that," she said fiercely; "but he would only laugh at me. I started, once, to hack down those evergreens—"

Quint regarded her with swift surprise, which intensified as she went on.

"I'd have thought you'd get rid of that log cabin. I set fire to it myself, one day last year. Mother never knew that, of course; and the worst of it was that she burned a big hole in her blue gingham saving it. You'd have thought she valued it more than her life."

Sybil burst suddenly and incomprehensively into tears.

"I almost hate you!" she said. "I've always wanted to do what you've been doing. I thought of it first, but they never would let me. I haven't had a chance. They wouldn't take me seriously. They've babied me—just because I'm so small, and like to keep my hands clean. I've been sat upon"—she choked—"and suppressed. Nobody has ever consulted me. I've hardly been allowed to fry an egg!"

To Quint the outburst was both astounding and immensely gratifying.

"Well, then," he suggested, as if to mollify a child, "how about your choosing the paint for the new barn?"

This seemed to coax her from her tears.

"How did you dare to build that first?" she scolded.

Smiling, Quint brought forward his defense:

"Oh, don't worry! Your mother understands all that. The barn's for the Holsteins, and they're going to pay for the new house. Anyhow, it seems to be your mother's idea that the lady who'll hang her hat up in it some day should be the one to boss the blue prints. She has a lot to say about the woman she thinks I'm going to marry."

Sybil turned upon him sidelong crescents of sharply wondering onion-blue. Then she smiled, and there was a mellower harmony in her voice.

"Just the same," she said, "I'd have built the house first. I've wished a dozen times for a cyclone to come whisking along and blow the old one away!"

Quint marveled that there should be so much vigor of intention in such a cameo of a body.

"Not a bad idea," he assented. "And that reminds me—you remember Hanks?"

He was listening as he spoke, and did not catch the girl's answer. A curious sound was in the air—something indistinguishable, at first, from the murmur of his running motor, then increasingly dominant above it. This was hardly the shattering, incessant salvo of remote thunder. It resembled, rather, the distant drumming of a waterfall, the vast resonance of hail upon a roof, a belch of flame unleashed and greedy for destruction.

A sigh stirred the silent, expectant landscape about them. There was a southward buffeting of cool airs.

Quint could feel the slight touch of Sybil's shoulder against his.

"What is it?" she whispered.

As if in answer, a shape detached itself from the southwestern segment of sky. It leaped, like a jinni, black from the pot of some giant magician—like a great carrot spinning upon its tip. It danced against an amorphous background of cloud, writhing, swinging, pirouetting—a serpentine entity that grew as it advanced.

Quint and the girl watched, stupid with fascination. The tornado's roar, now, was that of a train upon a bridge. Its tail whipped over the horizon, lashing the hushed, unresisting landscape. A nimbus of flying things rose in its wake. Save for its voice, the apparition was too unreal, too ludicrous and ungainly, to be greatly terrifying. Quint would hardly have confessed to serious apprehension, though the evil thing advanced unswervingly and threatened them momentarily nearer.

Abruptly Sybil cried out:

"The farm—it's coming that way!"

The threshing tail curled aloft for a space, and left untouched, except for lifted shingles and a swarm of small movables, the buildings upon a neighboring eighty. Then it was down again, whirling trees and fences into indescribable demolition.

Quint meshed the gears uneasily, and his foot stirred the motor into increased activity. He tried to plot the probable path of the storm, but remained undecided whether to stay or to run.

Even as he hesitated, he knew that decision was already too late. The uproar had increased. The static oppression of the atmosphere became unbearable. Then, as if equilibrium were being abruptly re-established, he felt the rush of mighty winds past his ears. With no impulse of his own the car moved beneath him, and he had the sensation of being suspended in mid-air. This was like an old nightmare of childhood, from which he would awake, screaming:

"I can't get back—I can't get back again to the earth!"

#### IV

WHEN he awoke he was in an unfamiliar room, and over him, like a frightened moon, hung a woman's face—not Sybil's, certainly. In another moment he recognized the wife of a near neighbor. She had been engaged, he observed, with a cloth and a

basin of water, wiping red ooze from a spot throbbing unmistakably upon his temple.

"Something struck you," explained the woman.

"But how did I get here?"

"The Kemp girl brought you, in the car. Had a terrible time of it, too; but she's strong, for such a little one. Hadn't you better stay still? The telephone line's down. Jimmy—that's our boy—he's after a doctor."

Quint tried ineffectually to rise from the couch upon which he lay.

"Where's Sybil?"

"Gone to see what's become of the Kemp place. Their house—you can see where it was."

She was awed as she spoke.

Quint, after a dizzy effort, viewed through a window the curious change that had come over Arcadia Farms. The ugly old house was gone, indeed, and the still older trees that had sheltered it lay twisted and broken. There was an appearance of disorder about the unfinished barn, but at least some of that was left. Windmill, well house, outbuildings, had vanished.

The log cabin! Quint was astonished at that, and rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was undeceived. Through some eccentricity of the storm it remained—decrepit relic though it was—humorously, smugly intact.

He could see no hint of human activity amid the desolation, and anxiety smote him. Hatless, he stumbled out of the room and out of the house, in spite of the infirmities that clutched at his legs. He was filled with the unflattering sense of being thoroughly unheroic. The sting of having been mute and inglorious in the midst of calamity spurred him over ground that seemed to undulate before him, treacherous and unstable.

There was a thin rain from the sorry sky, and dusk was coming. He realized that he must have been unconscious for several hours. Fragments of debris littered the fields. He stumbled over hay swept from its ricks, shreds of timber, half a mattress, and a frying pan forty rods, at least, from its kitchen.

There was nothing animate among the ruins as he approached, but a faint light was visible through the door of the log cabin. From within, too, there was audible a small singing voice.

Entering, Quint saw Sybil in the midst of curious incantations before the rusty stove. Upon it stood a tin can exuding the aroma of coffee, and a wash basin evidently about to serve as a skillet. Sybil was in the act of breaking an egg.

There was a sorry tangle in her bobbed hair. A smudge of charcoal marred the habitual pink of one cheek, and the torn sleeves of her blouse disclosed a fragile skin scratched and abraded with unwonted usage.

Upon a tolerably whole chair, in one corner, sat Nathan Kemp, dazed and wordless. Upon a mattress beside him, sighing under a pillow slip that bandaged her face, lay Euphonia Kemp.

"You're supposed to have been squashed by a flying hencoop," was Sybil's saucy greeting—pert words to cloak the snapping of a fetter of fear about her heart.

"And that's what makes you sing?" complained Quint.

"It's just that I'm the boss around here at last. I made them admit it before I pulled them out of the cellar!"

She gestured with an empty eggshell toward the pair in their corner.

"And look here," she resumed, "if you really don't belong any more to the hospital squad, you've got to make yourself useful. Kitchen things seem to be scattered all the way from here to Centerville. I want the bread box; and wait—give me that frying pan! While you're out, you might pick up a few knives and forks, if you can find them, and anything that's eatable. These eggs were in the basement, not a single one broken, but the bacon was in the potato patch—can you imagine that?"

Quint obediently started off to forage. She called after him:

"The oil's nearly out of this lantern. If you don't produce another, we'll have to eat in the dark!"

When he returned, burdened with gleanings, supper was spread upon the top of an ironing board. Mrs. Kemp was sitting up, observing Sybil with skeptical eye. Nathan was articulate once more under the stimulus of food.

"Took the house clean away," he began explaining. "We stood against the southwest wall of the cellar—that's always safest, you know. We'd seen it coming; but a piece of the barn came down on top of us and caught us like rats. There was

a big section of flooring resting against Euphonia's shoulders, and I thought sure she must be done for; but Sybil came along, after about a century. She nearly yanked her arms off trying to pull us loose. Then she got out the towrope—I'd never have thought of it—hitched the car to the flooring, and snaked it away as if it had been a shingle."

"Here, eat—don't talk," commanded Sybil; "and after that you'll go to bed."

Meekly Nathan Kemp subsided. Obedient, likewise, was Mrs. Kemp, though she sniffed inquiringly at the bacon and eggs before her.

"I didn't suppose," she said in quavering remonstrance, "that you could cook. You never even boiled water before, that I know of."

Sybil assumed an air of injured, chastening brevity.

"But that's just what I *have* been doing ever since I left here last July. I've been doing day work writing household hints for the editor—maybe you've read them yourself—and night work in a domestic science class. You wouldn't teach me things, so I've just had to do it myself!"

Her mother's pained astonishment had the relief of a fortuitous interruption. There was the uproar of a klaxon, and a pair of headlights intruded their glare through the door.

Hanks, the insurance agent, greeted them bluffly:

"Bridge out—had to go round by Valley Springs to get here. Centerville citizens' committee is sort of mopping things up. I'm with 'em. How many hurt?"

There was no pause for the obvious answer. He spied Sybil.

"What? Back to the catnip? Just what I thought, Mrs. Kemp! What I said, I believe; and that reminds me—"

He delved into his portmanteau and offered to Mr. Kemp a neat folder of documents.

"Your policies," he explained. "Been carrying them around with me for weeks, hoping I'd see you and save the postage."

Nathan Kemp's blankness of expression arrested him.

"I want to know!" he exclaimed. "You mean to tell me you didn't know about these cyclone insurance policies? This young book farmer of yours do it all on his own? Who's running this place, I'd like to ask?"



Still without adequate interlude, the voluble one was away upon his "mopping." To escape possible catechism, Quint vanished toward the barnyard, where he could hear the Holsteins murmuring of inattention. He found a battered milk pail and set about their relief.

Though windmill and well house were gone, the tank remained, and he set the milk, as always, in its cool depths. The old stable, from some freak of the storm, was little damaged, save for its missing roof, and the Clydesdales were there, unhurt and whinnying for their fodder. The light of his stable lantern revealed havoc among the pig pens, but nevertheless, when he had finished his investigation, Quint was whistling with satisfaction. Not much, by and large, was amiss with Arcadia Farms.

Not much was amiss, either, with life and the general arrangement of things. Sybil—

The whistle paused upon an ascending trill. Sybil would do, after all. Sybil certainly would do!

Of course, that led to another perplexity. Not that he hadn't thought of it before, but it had suddenly become imminent. She would do, but would she want to?

Suddenly he was aghast at the obvious alternative, the possible frustration of his whole glamorous intent.

## V

THE rain had ceased, and a star glittered between thinning clouds. Quint felt a curious distress. This, he tried to suppose, might be fever under his wounded scalp, but it might, too, be presage of disaster more outrageous than had been effected by the storm.

Stumbling with his burden, he returned to the cabin, bringing a collection of salvaged clothing, a roll of straw-stuffed canvas, a lap robe, and a pair of blankets.

Sybil's lantern had burned out, and she was clinging wearily to the doorpost, waiting. Neighbors had been there, she said, with offers of shelter, but these had been declined. Nathan and Euphonia were already tucked in bed.

Quint laid the straw mattress beside the stove, and smoothed the coverings upon it.

"I suppose," he said banteringly, yet with a humility that was involuntarily grave, "there'll be changes, now that you've come back to run the ranch. Probably you won't want me around; but we'll talk that over in the morning. Good night! The hay'll be soft enough, I hope. If I should happen to be paged, I'm bunking in the oats bin."

He heard no answer. A dozen steps away, as if unwilling to accept Sybil's silence, he turned and waited. He saw her slowly slipping to her knees, collapsing into a small heap among damp weeds beside the door.

This, oddly, gave him the assurance he had wanted. He knelt beside her, lifting her tired shoulders.

"Think you could keep house for awhile," he ventured, somewhat irrelevantly, "here in the old cabin?"

She sighed against his cheek.

"It would be fun!"

Maybe it was true, he thought gratefully, that the rough-hewn, homespun heroes were all dead, as Hanks had said, along with the epoch of pioneering; but there was grit left, and there was intelligence. This wasn't wholly a fair-weather generation.

"We can begin building right away," he added; "just as soon as you've had time to do some figuring on the plans."

Her breath was fragrant in his own.

"They're in my grip, Qui—Quintus. I've had them ready"—her whisper poised lightly upon the moment's ecstasy—"for months!"

## STRAY DOG

Your wistful eyes searched each one as he passed,  
Stray dog—so lost, so starved and starkly thin,  
And yet your gallant hope held to the last  
That there would come a heart to take you in.

Some came who jeered at your bewilderment,  
Some kicked you, shouted, threw things till you'd gone;  
But, oh, more cruel was the one who bent  
And petted you, and murmured—and went on.

Charlotte Misk

# Tips and Tipsters

A STORY OF TIA JUANA, IN WHICH VARIOUS SHORT CUTS TO WEALTH ARE TRIED WITH MORE OR LESS SENSATIONAL RESULTS TO ALL CONCERNED

By William H. Hamby

**A**MONG the crowd that surged up the plank walk after the last race, to catch the train for San Diego, was a tall young man with a light gray overcoat and a far-away look in his eyes. There were plenty of far-away looks, but his was different. It seemed to be a look of intention rather than one of regret.

On the train platform a raucous man with a bulbous nose was handing out posthumous copies of "Hose Blond's Handicap." It may be explained, for the benefit of the few virtuous Americans who have never bet on a horse race, that a "handicap" is a prophecy. In each race three horses get in on the money—first, second, and third—"straight," "place," and "show." The handicapper tries to foretell the winners. He sells his printed prediction before the races. After the last race copies of the same handicap, with a blue pencil mark around each horse that got in on the money, are handed out free to prove what a wise guy the handicapper is.

It does not matter to him whether the horses ran in the order he foretold or not. One listed to run first, if it comes in third, gets a blue mark just the same; but it makes a big difference to the sucker who followed his advice, and bet on a horse "straight," if that horse only "shows."

As he boarded the car, a copy of Hose Blond's masterpiece was thrust into the hands of the young man with the gray overcoat. He took it absently, went through the train to the forward car, and slipped into a seat by an open window. The car was filling fast. A small, dapper, oldish man popped into the seat beside him. He, too, held Mr. Blond's bid for regrets in his hand.

"Well, stranger," said the dapper one, "how did they treat you to-day?"

The young man, gazing out of the window toward the green mountains of Mexico, slowly tore the printed sheet into strips and flung them lightly out of the window.

"Soso," he replied, when he had disposed of the handicap.

"That's all it's worth," remarked the little man. "The thing's a steal. They sell it for forty cents, and if you followed its advice you could lose your shirt."

"It has been done," said the young man as the car pulled out.

"I don't go often," remarked the dapper one. "Just as a matter of recreation. A busy man needs some recreation."

"Not as much as an idle one," observed the other.

"My name is Biddle—Harrison J. Biddle," said the small man, putting out his hand.

"And mine is Newton Kerry," responded the other, taking the offered hand.

"I am a mining man," Biddle stated, pushing out his chest.

Kerry said nothing.

"My company sent me out here," Biddle volunteered, "to investigate a lot of mining properties throughout the Southwest. You see," he swelled, "I know the mining game from the ground up. That's why I'm worth millions to my company. I have the know how!" He tapped his head to show the seat of that vast knowledge. "The secret of making success in mining is to organize, deputize, standardize, and check to volume."

As the train slipped along through the orange groves and palms toward San Diego, Kerry's eyes turned to the window, but his ear caught a continuous stream of

rounded mining phrases, through which ran, like a refrain:

"Organize, deputize, standardize, and check to volume."

He wondered if these empty words meant any more to the speaker than they did to him.

The chubby train was pulling into the city, past fish canning factories and lumber yards, beyond which rows and rows of torpedo boat destroyers, locked together, rusted in the bay.

The little man had fallen silent. He sat twisting his fingers, like a schoolboy who has forgotten his piece. He looked at his watch and cleared his throat. His brown eyes no longer bounced, but crept furtively to his seat-mate.

"Where do you stop?" he inquired.

"The Warren Hotel," replied Kerry.

"I wonder"—Biddle cleared his throat and wriggled in the seat—"if I could—"

"No!" Kerry shook his head positively. "I can't spare you ten until your expense check arrives, but I can share my room with you."

"Sir," bristled the little man, "I'm not begging!"

"Oh, no," Kerry said wearily. "Of course not! You are a millionaire temporarily out of funds, and you have a system to beat the races—to-morrow."

"That's exactly what I have," Biddle bridled. "Let me tell you my idea."

Kerry shook his head and rose. The train had stopped.

"Don't trouble," he said. "Come on, though. I'm good for a night's lodging."

The little man tagged after him closely. They started up the street together toward the hotel.

"I might mention, while I think of it," remarked the young man somberly, "that the next time I share my room with a bum and he runs off with my overcoat and clothes, I'll kill him if I have to follow him to Jerusalem!"

The little man took no notice of the warning. He could not afford to be insulted.

"Really," he persisted, as they entered the room, "I have a wonderful idea for beating the races!"

"Organize, deputize, standardize, and check to volume?" mocked Kerry. "While you're my guest, you'd better pipe down. Think in dimes and doughnuts instead of mines and millions. Your problem and

mine, just now, is how to eat at occasional intervals."

The young man left Biddle in possession and went down on the streets to continue his search for Tom Kilyan. Tom Kilyan was a person for whom he had been searching ever since his arrival, five days before. To-night he felt a peculiarly keen desire to meet Tom face to face.

## II

HARRISON J. BIDDLE sat by the radiator, hugging his knees, his thin brownish hair straggling down his forehead like spider legs. He was depressed and bitterly humiliated. He could smell coffee being poured into two thick mugs, yet he hated his host.

It was not a matter of being broke and accepting another man's hospitality. That had happened before. It was the matter of conversation that galled. Not only did Kerry disbelieve the little man's story about his mining connections, but he did not even pretend to believe it. Worse still, he refused to let Biddle talk about it.

"Come on!" Kerry called in a not unfriendly tone.

He had more than made good his promise. The room had two beds and heat, and he had brought up a whole quart of hot black coffee and a bag of doughnuts.

Biddle, half dressed, turned with an injured air from the radiator to the coffee and doughnuts on the little stand table. He felt better after a few gulps.

"This reminds me," he said, "of the time I was inspecting the Canadian mine in Chihuahua."

"Oh, cut it!" ordered Kerry shortly. "Fill your own stomach with hot air, but don't try it on me."

The little man, squelched for the moment, relapsed into silent absorption of food. Damn a man who robbed you of your self-respect!

"Now about beating the races," ventured Biddle, when the last doughnut was finished.

"Oh, hell!" snapped Kerry. "You can't beat the races. You could never beat anything, unless it was a cripple or a widow. In the last three days two hundred smarter men than you have told me how to beat the races. That's why I've got to raise some money to-day if we're to eat to-morrow. I want you to go down to the Jockey Club, in the Winkler Building, after

awhile, and find out what a concession to sell handicaps at the track will cost." He turned to a light, flexible grip at the foot of the bed. "I'm going down to the races," he announced. "See you this evening."

"Why don't you take me?" protested Biddle, resentful at being left behind.

He already considered himself a partner, and, once a partner, he thought of himself as the head of the company.

"You would have to walk," replied Kerry. "I have just fifty cents."

"How are you going to get back?" asked Biddle, with sudden alarm about to-morrow's room rent and doughnuts.

"I'm going to sell these books," Kerry told him, picking up the grip.

"Books? Sell books at Tia Juana?" Then light dawned on the little man. "Oh, racing books!"

"No"—Kerry shook his head—"the works of William Shakespeare."

### III

By the sixth race Kerry had emptied his flexible grip, and at the change booth had swapped fifty silver dollars for five ten-dollar bills. No one had discovered that he was selling without a permit, and, so far, not one of the buyers had learned that he had been sold.

He strolled out to the fence, to watch the eight entrants of the next race parade by the judges' stand. A girl stepped into the gap at his left and stood with her hands on the fence, peering eagerly at the parading thoroughbreds. Kerry caught a whiff of the most delicate and romantic perfume he had ever encountered. Compared to the ordinary Tia Juana scent it was as the fragrance of the wild grape bloom to a field of rotting cabbages.

She touched his arm excitedly. He sighed, for he had expected that; but when he turned to look at her he found what he had not expected—one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen. Her eyes were the color of soft summer clouds, and her lashes long and darkly tipped at the ends.

"Do you know which is the favorite in this race?" she said.

"No, lady." Kerry shook his head. "I don't know the favorite, or the best long shot, or the one who is going to place, or the four or five that may show; and I wouldn't bet on them if I did."

"Isn't No. 4 a beauty?"

Kerry watched her from the corner of

his eye. Whether No. 4 was or not, she was.

"Yes, he looks all right."

"He belongs to me." The girl's face was alive. "I think he is going to win."

"Lady," said Kerry wearily, "in the last three days more than three hundred owners of horses have given me a tip that they were going to put one over."

She brought her eyes from the horse to the young man, and frowned sharply.

"You don't believe me?"

He shook his head resolutely. It was a hard thing to do with those eyes fixed upon him.

"No, I don't; but I wouldn't bet on him if I knew he belonged to the Prince of Wales, or Norma Talmadge."

She studied him for a moment, and then laughed. There is something so shiningly innocent in newly coined cynicism that it does not deceive any good observer, especially a woman with intuition.

Kerry, without any special volition, found himself walking back to the grand stand with the dark-haired girl. It was to be a mile and a quarter race, and the horses were at the barrier. She was so excited over the start that he began to wonder if she really did own the black horse. He looked over her shoulder at the program:

No. 4—Starry Night—Owner, Norma Jackson.

The starter was having trouble getting the horses lined up. The girl's eyes never left them, but she remarked in an aside:

"I suppose you haven't been lucky at the races?"

"Yes, very lucky," he said. "I lost all I had in three days. It might have taken me two months."

"Poor boy!" she exclaimed under her breath. "Was it much?"

"In dollars, no—in sweat, yes."

"I've bet everything I've got on Starry Night," she said. Then springing to her feet, her hands clenched. "They're off!" she cried.

Kerry felt a little guilty. Had he really misjudged this girl? She certainly acted as if she owned No. 4 and had her last dollar on him. She coaxed and begged and implored and prayed Starry Night to come in.

He did, eventually, but there were four or five ahead of him.

The girl dropped back in her seat. Kerry



looked down at her. She was not crying, but she was white, and shook like a cotton-wood leaf.

"He really was your horse, then?" he said aloud.

She bit her lip and nodded.

"Are you broke?"

His hand was fumbling those five ten-dollar bills in his pocket.

Still biting her lip, she shook her head. Then she jumped up and smiled—a forced but brave attempt.

"I beg your pardon for mistrusting you," he said earnestly; "but I've been fooled so many times."

"Forget it," she said. "You need suspicion here; but don't ever get so that you can't be fooled at all. You're dead then."

He was at a loss what to say next, and put out his hand. She took it in a quick, sympathetic grip.

"You don't happen to be Tom Kilyan?"

"No—but that's queer!"

"What is queer?" she asked.

"That you should think I was Tom Kilyan. He's the man I came down here to find."

On the board walk up to the train, he was still thinking how queer it was that she should ask if he were Tom Kilyan. He and Tom did not remotely resemble each other. He remembered, however, that he had been thinking of Kilyan at the moment when she asked the question.

Kilyan was the one man in America whom Kerry was most anxious to find. He had followed him all the way down from Puget Sound, but had lost the trail at the border.

#### IV

BIDDLE stood by the radiator, his coat buttoned snugly, his thin hair meticulously parted in the middle, rocking himself on toes and heels, waiting for the return of his partner. He felt quite expansive toward Kerry. A crab, but a good sort, nevertheless. He would deal generously with the young fellow. He had much to learn, but he would be useful in their organization.

Biddle had had a great day, a most successful day. In the morning he had gone down to the Jockey Club, as Kerry had suggested, to see about a permit for selling handicaps at the race track. The Jockey Club was badly managed—frightfully managed. He had waited nearly an hour for Jim Goforth to come in. Goforth slept

late, they said. Think of a man at the head of a big organization like that sleeping late! Couldn't do that in the mining game!

Biddle had got tired of waiting for the president of the club, and, disdaining to ask questions of a subordinate, had gone down to the Grant Hotel, to see if there were any important mining men around the lobby. By one of those happy incidents by which fortunes are sometimes made, he had happened to sit down beside a square-shouldered, strongly built chap with thick sandy eyebrows and very innocent pale blue eyes. Biddle had opened about the weather, and had followed by introducing himself. The stranger was instantly interested. He listened to Biddle's exposition of the principles of success in mining with the greatest attention, and was deeply impressed by that remarkable summing up:

"To make big returns a company must organize, deputize, standardize, and check to volume."

At last the fellow had modestly confessed that he had a mine—a most wonderful mine—across the Mexican line, in the mountains east of Guadalupe. He proposed that Biddle's company should either take it over and operate it on shares or buy it outright, and offered to take the great mining man out to-morrow to inspect the property.

Biddle's pleasant recollections of that most satisfactory interview were suddenly jerked into the present by the sound of steps in the hall. He rose high on his toes and dropped back solidly on his heels. This was a story that even the dumb-bell Kerry would have to respect. The fellow's name? That had slipped. No, he had written it down. Here it was on the back of an old envelope:

Tom Kilyan, Guadalupe, Mexico

Kerry entered with a preoccupied look and a casual "Hello," hung up his hat, and took off his coat. Biddle, still rocking himself back and forth on toes and heels, watched him from the corner of his eye. His resentment began to smart again. The fellow had come into the room and passed him up as if his day's achievements were not worth a question.

"Had a great day to-day," Biddle ventured.

"So?" Kerry stood by the lavatory in

the corner of the room, rolling up his sleeves.

"A wonderful streak of luck," continued the pompous, shiny little man, visibly swelling.

"Yes?"

Kerry turned the hot water faucet. Apparently he was thinking of something entirely different.

"I acquired for my company an option on one of the richest silver mines in Mexico."

"Is that so?" returned the young man, beginning to wash his hands.

This was not the sort of attention the great news deserved, but at least it was an improvement on being ordered to shut up. Biddle launched into a detailed description of his way of managing it, and of the vast mental preparation required for seizing just such opportunities as this; but he failed to mention the fellow's name. It had slipped his mind again, and anyway it did not matter.

"Did you get that handicap information from the Jockey Club?" asked Kerry, drying himself with the towel.

The question was most inopportune, coming right at the foot of an oratorical flight which was meant to rise to dramatic heights.

"No." Biddle waved impatiently. "I went down to see about it, but the thing is badly managed—"

"They don't organize, deputize, standardize, and check to volume," Kerry grinned. "Doesn't matter. I arranged it so we won't need a concession from the race track people."

Biddle started again on the glory of his day's achievement in acquiring important mining connections. Kerry, apparently, was so deeply absorbed in something else that he did not even shut the little man off. Instead, he counted out bills and silver on the bed, sat down with an old envelope and a stub of a pencil, and began to figure.

"I'm going to inspect the properties to-morrow," announced Biddle.

Still studying his figures, Kerry remarked, without looking up:

"No, you are not. You are going to sell handicaps to-morrow. A herd that will pay a dollar a copy for a nickel edition of Shakespeare's 'Midsummer Night's Dream' merely because you wink at them, will mistake your wind for brains."

Biddle quit teetering and settled down flat on his feet. His round brown eyes glared at Kerry. His mouth opened and shut, and he swallowed convulsively two or three times. How he hated that man! If he had a gun, he would kill the fellow. His right arm gave a grand but feeble gesture of negation.

"I will *not* be selling handicaps to-morrow!"

Kerry reassembled the bills and silver and stuffed them into his pocket. Then he got up and took his hat from a nail in the closet door.

"All right!" he nodded. "Run along and get your supper and find another room. Any bum that hangs around me has got to work like the devil at a revival meeting."

Biddle started, but stopped short of the door, a lost, hungry look drowning his recent enthusiasm.

"How much will you gimme?"

"Ten dollars a day and board. Right?"

"Right!" assented the little man with alacrity.

## V

THE bulbous-nosed, raucous-voiced fellow walked up and down the platform as the crowd streamed up from the last race to the San Diego train, handing out marked copies of "Hose Blond's Handicap."

"Hose Blond gets ten in the money to-day! Hose Blond gets ten in the money to-day!"

Presently the bulbous-nosed one became aware that he had a rival. A pompous little man in a shiny but neatly fitting suit, wearing a green derby cocked a bit to one side, was also walking up and down the platform handing out slips of paper, and his voice, hypnotically oratorical, got in under the other's raucous call:

"Take a look! Take a look! Be a sport, not a piker! A handicap that is a handicap—'The Seer's Handicap'! Got six out of seven. We pick winners. We pick 'em only to win. We don't put 'em first, and then have 'em run third. Get a real handicap to-morrow. Have a look! Have a look! Be a sport, not a piker!"

A thousand copies of "The Seer's Handicap," marked, showing six straight wins out of seven, passed into the train, and was the wonder of all racing bugs—who always hope to beat it to-morrow.

At two o'clock the next day the pompous little man in a green derby walked

back and forth outside the gates. He had a satchel strapped around his shoulders, and wore on the lapel of his coat a large badge:

#### THE SEER'S HANDICAP

Men and women eagerly rushed the little man, but to each of them he regretfully explained:

"All gone! We print only twenty, and sell 'em at ten dollars apiece. That way we don't reduce the odds for the lucky ones."

That evening Hose Blond reported but nine winners, and only two of them firsts. "The Seer's Handicap" reported seven firsts—not one missed. This continued for four days, and by that time the new handicap was the wonder of the races, but harder to get than a ticket to a bootleggers' convention.

The Saturday evening and Sunday morning newspapers carried a four-inch double-column advertisement in the sport pages:

#### THE SEER'S HANDICAP

##### The Wonder of the Racing World

In four days twenty-five firsts out of a total of twenty-eight. We issue a very small number and charge a big price, to prevent reducing the odds on winners. Sunday we will print a slightly larger number, but the issue will be limited.

The price is ten dollars. Get one quick, if you get it at all. See the man in the green derby.

Sunday was a perfect California day, and the human stream poured down the highways and railways to the races as if spilled from some vast reservoir of life.

The pompous little man in the green derby walked in front of the gates like a king outside a conquered city. The open bag he carried strapped about his shoulder had two pockets—one for the handicaps, and one for the money. He was too busy swapping one for the other that his arms flailed like the fans of a windmill.

"How are they going?" inquired Kerry, who approached during a brief lull.

"Like pennies among pickaninnies," Biddle answered proudly.

"Think we'll sell all of them?"

"In twenty minutes."

"Give me some change," said Kerry hastily, as a group of buyers bore down on them.

Biddle reached down into the money pocket, thrust a handful of ten-dollar bills

into Kerry's hand, and turned to lift up his jubilant call:

"Have a look! Have a look! A real handicap! Be a sport, not a piker."

Kerry stuffed the wad of bills into his coat pocket, and went through the gates in a sort of somnolent daze. He was making a killing with his handicap, and there was not a thing that anybody could hang on him for it.

He walked along in front of the grand stand, searching the faces, until he saw a girl with black hair and long lashes, in the seventh row up.

She greeted him with an enthusiastic squeeze of the arm as he sat down beside her.

"I'm awfully glad to see you!" she said, and her eyes corroborated her words.

"Same here," returned Kerry.

He had been seeing her every day since they first met, and had learned a good deal about her. Her father had owned a string of race horses, but had died in debt the year before. With only one horse left—Starry Night—she had pushed him into a race the other day against her trainer's advice. He had failed, and on him she had lost the small remnant of her funds. Now the horse was eating his head off, and she was desperate what to do about it.

Kerry looked down at her out of the corner of his eye, feeling awfully sorry for her. If it was hard for a husky like him to connect with three meals a day—or even two—what must it be for an innocent kid like her? He cleared his throat.

"Norma Jackson, how honest are you?"

Her long lashes opened wide, and there was a hurt look in the gray eyes she turned to him. He shook his head and grinned.

"No, I'm not doubting you, but just wondering what you'll think when you know that I'm not on the level."

She laughed with relief, and once more her fingers squeezed his arm.

"You couldn't help but be," she said.

He gulped again.

"I was until—quite recently. I ran a motor boat up among the islands in Puget Sound—freight and passengers. Made fairly good money, but the engine got a cough, and the old tub took to drinking too much salt water. I needed a new boat, and I'd saved up twenty-four hundred dollars. Then a fellow with the honestest blue eyes and hard-working hands you ever saw came along. He was a miner, and he had

found something awfully rich. He sold me an interest for fifteen hundred dollars, walked off with the money, and forgot to come back. I tracked him down here, and, like a damned fool, I got to betting on the races. It took 'em just three days to clean me out of the rest. Didn't have even car fare back to my one-lung boat."

"You poor boy!" she said, laying her hand on his sleeve again.

"The more I thought of it, the sorer I got. They say the place to find your money is where you lost it. The races had cleaned me, and I started to get even. I'm 'The Seer's Handicap,' and I'm trimming the suckers finely to-day!"

He looked down at her, fearful of the effect of this news. She looked up in surprise.

"But I thought 'The Seer's Handicap' was the wonder of the world. Why, it guessed twenty-five out of twenty-eight races."

He shook his head.

"One out of four," he confessed. "You see, I have been printing my handicap after the races were run—all except the last race. I had to guess the last one to get the printing and marking done in time. I arranged with a little printing shop across the line to set up the name of the winner of each race as fast as it was run, up to the sixth. I guessed the seventh. Then we rushed out a thousand copies, marked them, and had them ready to hand out at the train. We did that for four days as a bait. To-day we're selling five hundred copies before the races—all pure guesses. This is to be my good-by Tia Juana stake."

She frowned a moment, then burst into a rollicking laugh.

"It's clever, but if I were you I wouldn't hang around after the first race. They might just as well lose the ten to you as to the betting machine, but the losers may not feel that way about it."

"I'd figured it that way," he grinned; "but I'm going to hang around until after the first race. I have a hunch that a long shot is coming in, and I'm going to bet ten dollars for you and ten for me."

She protested, but he went off to the betting booths downstairs. When he came back, after the winners were posted, she greeted him excitedly.

"Was the fifty to two your hunch?" she asked eagerly.

He nodded, and counted out two hun-

dred and fifty dollars—bills he had got from Biddle. He had not bet at all. She flushed radically, and squeezed his hands.

"Isn't that lovely?" she cried.

"I've got to find Biddle," he told her, embarrassed by her gratitude, "and make my get-away before my handicap gets sicker."

But he did not find Biddle. The little man and forty-five hundred and some odd dollars had disappeared from the face of the earth.

## VI

It was raining, and rain in southern California is so unusual that there seems to be more wetness in one-tenth of an inch of it than in an inch of rain anywhere else. Kerry was wet—wet to the skin. The bottoms of his trouser legs flopped wetly about his ankles, his collar hung about his neck like a wet rag. He was chilly, too, and it was dark.

He was walking in from Grossmont, where he had been on another wild-goose chase. A milkman had reported seeing a little man in one of the vacant summer houses there, and Kerry had gone out to see if it wasn't Harrison J. Biddle. He climbed all over the mountain and knocked at half a hundred doors before he found the little man—who turned out to be a former Secretary of State, out for a rest.

Kerry was walking back, and swearing under his breath at every flap of his wet clothes. Every rod or two he had to get off the pavement to let a glaring-eyed automobile whizz by. For five days and nights he had searched highways and byways, hotels and resorts of all kinds, for Biddle and his forty-five hundred dollars; but the search had been as futile as chasing chaff in the wind.

He had not appealed to the police. It was not a case for the courts. Kerry did not fancy going before a judge with the story of "The Seer's Handicap." This was a personal matter. All he wanted was about twenty minutes with the little man.

But he was through now. Hunting one small man by yourself in a world of midgets was like looking for the soap in a tub of suds. It was the more hopeless because Kerry's money was gone. In one of those wet, flapping pockets huddled a dollar and thirty-five cents in silver—every cent he had left.

The rain had drooled off into a drizzle



as he turned down C Street, near Third. The windows of a café—one where you sit on a stool at a long counter—aroused a latent hunger.

On the stool he unfolded the paper napkin and studied the food on the shelf, trying to decide between pie and doughnuts. A trim waitress with black hair and a white apron turned to him for his order.

"You!"

The exclamation was both surprise and accusation. For a flash he thought he had been taken in again, for Norma Jackson was not a race horse owner, but a waitress. Then he remembered he had not taken her word for that.

She smiled at him, a little abashed. A girl is about as proud of her first job as a waitress as a man is of his first trip with his overcoat to a pawnshop. Kerry jumped to the conclusion she had bet the two hundred and fifty dollars he gave her, and had lost it.

"Did you lose out again?" he inquired.

She shook her head, and her eyes lighted.

"No, I invested it. I decided Starry Night might never be a winner, and I sold him for four hundred dollars. After the stable bills were paid I had fifty dollars and the two hundred and fifty you won for me. I put the three hundred into something that will make a fortune."

"What?" he asked flatly.

"A mine."

"Where?" Kerry's tongue seemed to find only one word at a time.

"Guadalupe, Mexico. I had been hearing of it for weeks, for nearly all the racing people had been buying stock in it, but I didn't know how wonderful it was until a mining man came to see me last Wednesday evening."

Kerry's spine stiffened. His shoulders squared. His eyes questioned keenly.

"A little man who has the know how?" he said. "A shiny little man who organizes, deputizes, standardizes, and checks to volume?"

"Yes," she replied, surprised. "Do you know him?"

He slid off the stool, dropping the paper napkin on the floor.

"Hell, yes!" Kerry's fingers shaped as if reaching for the mining man's throat. "Where is he?"

"I don't know." Uneasiness crossed her face. "He hasn't been back since. It's all right, isn't it?"

For a moment Kerry stood looking at her. He could not lie about it.

"You poor kid! We poor damned fools!"

And he was gone.

He headed for the Warren Hotel. The shelter and warmth of a room was his for one day more.

## VII

THE door of Kerry's room was unlocked. He was sure he had locked it. He pushed the door back and stepped in.

"Hell fire!"

The exclamation was the most astonished of his life. There by the radiator, chest out, thumbs in his vest holes, rocking himself from toes to heels, was Harrison J. Biddle. A wide, patronizing, forgiving smile covered the little man's round face.

"You thought I was gone," Biddle said.

"You have been!"

Kerry had closed the door and walked halfway across the room. His fingers curved wantonly.

"I know, but you thought I had run off with our money."

"Our money!" Kerry's eyes were leveled at the pompous little man. "Well, you didn't leave it behind, did you?"

"No." Biddle beamed effulgently. "I am not like the unprofitable servant who buried his talent in a napkin. I believe in making money work for you. You see, I knew that with your lack of business experience the money would run through your fingers like salt through a shaker. I decided, therefore, to invest it so it would make a fortune for both of us."

"Invest it!" Kerry took a step nearer, still holding his hands to his sides by sheer force. "You mean you invested my money?"

Biddle nodded complacently.

"Our money," he corrected. "Don't forget it was I who actually got the money. You acted as printer—I sold the handicaps. But that is a small matter. You'll be surprised when you know I've made fifty thousand dollars for you."

"Fifty thousand dollars! How?"

Biddle nodded confidently.

"I have bought a half interest in one of the richest mines in Mexico!"

Again Kerry's tongue found only one word:

"Where?"

"Guadalupe, Mexico. The man who

opened the mine and sold an interest to me is a practical mining man. He has developed fifteen mines and made money on all of them."

A cold, curious premonition came over Kerry.

"What's the man's name?" he inquired.

"Thomas Kilyan," replied Biddle, who had become aware that Kerry's eyes looked a bit peculiar. "Do you know him?"

Kerry's fingers again clutched, but he controlled his movements. He stood for a moment, tense, thinking.

"Yes," he said deliberately, "I know him, and I know of at least two mines he has made money on. You stay here for a few minutes until I come back."

When Kerry returned, a quarter of an hour later, his vest pocket was empty, but his right pocket bulged. He had swapped his watch for something less regular but more emphatic.

Biddle had been more or less puzzled. Kerry had not reacted as the little man expected. He showed practically no gratitude; but of course some fellows felt more than they showed. Biddle was still in doubt about that strange look in the other's face; but Kerry's voice was reasonably friendly.

"Since you left, Biddle, I have acquired something more that I want to put into the company." The fingers of his right hand were caressing a cold, curved handle in his pocket. "We will go out to the mine to-night and see Kilyan."

"We don't have to go to the mine." Biddle's spirits bounded like a golf ball on a dry fairway. This would increase his commission, for the promoter had promised him a quarter of all the money he brought in. He had got seventy-five dollars out of that girl. "Kilyan and I have a room down at the Borderland Hotel, near Tia Juana. I just ran up to say 'hello' and break the good news to you."

"All right! Let's catch a stage," Kerry was moving toward the door. "By the way," he asked, as they turned the key, "did you mention me to Kilyan?"

Biddle grew red with embarrassment. He cleared his throat cautiously.

"N-o—I didn't—I let him think the investment was all mine; but of course I meant to split fifty fifty with you."

"Good!"

Kerry's relief was another puzzle to the little man.

It was nearly midnight when Kerry and Biddle stood before the door of a bedroom in the Borderland Hotel. Through the transom Kerry saw that there was still a light.

Biddle gave a discreet knock. Kerry stood a little to one side. The door opened cautiously.

"It's me," said the little man, with the enthusiasm of one who was sure to be welcomed. "I've brought another investor."

The door swung open. Biddle stepped in and turned to introduce his friend; but Kilyan saw Kerry first, and hastily backed two steps. At the same time his hand started toward his hip pocket.

"Stop it!"

The words hurtled past the astonished little man like a hand grenade. He turned his head, then ducked and scuttled to one side like a hen that has just seen a hawk.

There *had* been something the matter with Kerry's eyes. He was crazy—and he had a gun leveled straight at the other's chest.

"All right, Kilyan!" The speaker's tone sounded like murder. "Put 'em up and turn your back." Then, with a nod to Biddle: "Go through his pockets. Do exactly as I say, or I'll kill you, too!"

Tremblingly the little man dug a gun, a knife, and a blackjack from Kilyan's clothes.

"Bring the mining tools to me," Kerry ordered, and Biddle obeyed.

"Sit down," Kerry commanded.

Kilyan turned and backed into a chair. Biddle, too, stumbled backward until he collapsed in a seat.

"You know, Kerry," Kilyan said coolly, "you can be sent to the pen for this. I have not violated the law."

Kerry nodded.

"I know. I can also be hanged for what I'm going to do."

Kilyan's jaw sagged, his eyes lost their assurance.

"What are you going to do?"

"Empty this gun into your damned carcass unless you disgorge every dollar you have stolen from me!"

Kilyan chewed his lips for a moment and moved his head restlessly. There was nothing that looked like assistance to him anywhere in sight.

"How much is it?"

"Fifteen hundred you got at Puget Sound, forty-five hundred from that jelly-

fish there, and three hundred you pilfered from Norma Jackson. Add it yourself."

"My money is in the bank," Kilyan said.

"You mean *my* money. What bank?"

"The Bay City State."

"Let's see your pass book."

Kerry found deposits aggregating twelve thousand dollars.

"All right," he said, "give me a check."

Kilyan wrote out a check for sixty-three hundred dollars.

"Now," said Kerry, "where is your bottle?"

Biddle jumped up officially and extracted two quart bottles from the closet—one of *tequila* and one of whisky—got glasses, and poured Kerry a drink.

The young man shook his head.

"Give it to Kilyan."

Kilyan drank it as if he needed it.

"Now one for yourself," Kerry ordered.

Biddle followed orders without reluctance.

"All right!" Kerry grinned, as the glass was drained. "Now another for Kilyan."

It went the way of the first.

"One more for yourself."

After four drinks apiece, Kerry rested them for half an hour, then started again. At two o'clock they were pretty drunk; at half past two fully drunk; at three they were dead to the universe.

"All right!" Kerry grinned down at the drunks sprawled on the floor. "You won't stop payment on any checks before noon to-morrow!"

He locked the door and went out.

### VIII

It was dusk. Kerry had pulled the blinds and turned on the lights. He stood before the glass in his shirt sleeves. A new suit of clothes lay spread out on the bed.

There was a knock. He turned his head toward the door, with his razor suspended in air, and called:

"Come in!"

The door opened cautiously about a quarter of the way, and a human wreck pushed reluctantly through, like paste from a shaving tube. Kerry stared at his visitor unblinkingly. The little man's trousers were splattered with mud to the knee. Three buttons were ripped off his vest, and his coat was torn at the shoulders. His collar hung limply, unbuttoned in front. There was a heavy black ring under his

left eye, and a gash of dried blood on his right cheek.

"Well?" Kerry's tone was coolly non-committal.

The little man, who had stood with his left hand on the doorknob, ready to make a sudden get-away if necessary, edged a little further into the room and closed the door behind him.

"Well?" Kerry repeated. "What happened?"

"He came to first," said Biddle mournfully.

Kerry nodded grimly.

"And it looks as if he checked to volume."

Biddle filed along the wall like a scared ash cat, to the radiator, and propped himself against it while Kerry finished his shaving. The little man was thoroughly sober now. He had not eaten since yesterday. Moreover, he had walked fifteen miles into town. He could not make out Kerry, and had no idea what to say.

"I really thought he was honest," he ventured apologetically, as Kerry rubbed his face with a towel.

"No," said Kerry, "you didn't think. You never do—you only believe. A man who lies as much to himself as you do doesn't dare think."

Biddle swallowed painfully. His stomach was raising a mournful row.

"Did you get our—the money?"

Kerry turned sharply on him—so sharply that he backed a step and stumbled against the radiator.

"Now listen! Get this straight, if you never got anything straight before. I hired you for ten dollars a day to sell handicaps. You agreed to the price and were tickled to death with the job. Then you stole my money and ran away."

"I—I—" Biddle choked.

"I ought to have killed you for that." Biddle edged a step toward the door, and looked wildly at the young man. "Instead, I'm going to pay you what I owe you. You have fifty dollars coming—isn't that right?"

"Right!"

The little man brightened. Fifty dollars right now would be a lot of money.

Kerry took a roll of bills from his pocket and peeled off five tens. Biddle clutched them eagerly.

"Now we are square," said Kerry.

"Yes," nodded the little man.

"Here!" Kerry took off two more—hundreds, this time. "Two hundred and fifty is all you need. A man of your vast know-how can organize a million-dollar company on that; only be careful not to get checked to volume too often."

For a moment Biddle ran the bills lovingly through his fingers. Then he crushed them into his pocket, lifted his chest and shoulders, and started to speak.

"Get out now," ordered Kerry. "I'm to be married in half an hour, and I've got to dress."

"Married?" Biddle's mouth opened. "To that little girl in the café?"

"Yes. Beat it now."

Biddle walked toward the door, his clothes sadly limping, but his shoulders strutting. He turned reproachfully.

"Mere babes in the woods, both of you! Neither of you know anything about business, but I wish you well, anyway!"

Kerry grinned as the door closed with a decided slam. A bridegroom—one who was to marry Norma Jackson—could forgive the whole world its folly and deceit.

"I'll wager," he said, turning back to his clothes on the bed, "that when that little cuss goes to Hades he will convince himself he's merely on an inspection tour to organize, deputize, standardize, and check to volume!"

## Son of the Sun

A TALE OF THE FAR NORTH, SHOWING THAT JEALOUSY MAY BURN AS FIERCELY AND LUCK MAY BE AS FICKLE ON THE COLD ARCTIC SHORES AS ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

By Don Cameron Shafer

"I DO not have to hunt—I do not even have to think!" boasted Ak-o-tuk, lazily content and grossly fat, as he rested his huge bulk on a soft musk-ox hide before his skin *tupik*. "For once I have plenty of meat!"

Closing his little black eyes, which were all but buried in the bulging folds of his round face, he interlaced pudgy brown fingers over a bulging middle and lolled comfortably back against the skin-covered stones in sleepy, contented indolence.

"All the young men of the village keep bringing me things," sighed he, enjoying this temporary popularity even more than his newly acquired wealth. "Look at me, who once was poor! My meat racks hang heavy with food. I have the finest dogs, the strongest weapons, the greatest store of skins. I am rich, rich! *Aya-ah*, it is good to have a beautiful daughter!"

He regretted that only women were within sound of his guttural, braggart voice—women who evidenced little or no interest in his good fortune. They were sitting

in the warm summer sun that swung around and around the top of the world in one long, continuous day, working at the skins, flensing, scraping, sewing with bone awl and sinew thread, keeping up a lively chattering of their own.

"Always it has been the custom for a father to choose his own son-in-law," explained the Bird Woman.

"*Eh-yeh!*" exclaimed her daughter. "I shall have something to say about that!"

"Very little," sighed her mother knowingly, "and mostly woman's words that carry no weight in the councils of the men. Try to remember that Ta-chau-waq is a mighty hunter."

"He is old," said the girl in a low voice. "Ma-tok is young and—"

"That spoiled boy!" interrupted the Bird Woman, anxious that her daughter should have a good provider, if nothing else, in a land where famine threatened every long winter. "He couldn't find game enough to keep a dog alive in the Month of Plenty!"



"He is the son of the sun," said Au-let-ah, as if this were all-sufficient.

"His power is yet to be proved," answered the mother; "and what your father decides in this matter is the law."

"The law!" sneered the girl disdainfully.

"I have the best kayak," droned the well-fed, drowsy father who was the law. "I have a big knife of the ironstone and a strong new sledge. I am rich! *Aya*, it is well said that a man who has a beautiful daughter has everything!"

"For a little while," answered the Bird Woman sharply, above the *thump, thump* of her hammer stone, as she pounded a soaked caribou tendon to fiber, so that it could be twisted into sinew thread. "Don't you forget, my man, that when our beautiful daughter goes from our *tupik*, everything follows, and then you will have to hunt again!"

"*Hei! Hei!*" laughed Ak-o-tuk, for he was clever. "When she goes!"

"She will go," sighed the mother. "Girls always do."

"You women," rowled the father, in a loud voice so that his daughter must hear, "listen well to the voice of your man! When she goes, she goes to Ta-chau-waq, the greatest hunter of them all, who has promised me a generous share of his meat forever."

"*Thuck!*" scoffed the mother. "That fellow continually makes big words that mean very little!"

## II

A WEALTHY man indeed was Ak-o-tuk. For fourteen hard years he had hunted and struggled, and often enough had gone hungry himself, to enjoy the luxury of a daughter in his igloo. It is an expensive luxury when one must wrest a bare and precarious living from the cold and darkness, from ice and snow and relentless polar winds, but now it brought its well-earned reward. For, even as he boasted, Ak-o-tuk was the richest, the fattest, the most contented man in that tiny village of eleven sealskin *tupiks*, or summer tents, on the narrow, rocky beach beside the arctic sea.

The people of the village were polar Eskimo, or Arctic Highlanders—people still in the stone age, counting their riches in stores of meat, in skin boats and knives of meteoric iron. Behind their little oval skin

tents the land thrust up out of the cold, dark northern sea into a beetling cliff—a gray rampart battered through æons of time by polar winds, by broken ice and heavy seas, until the hard rock was worn away into a narrow beach of tumbled stones grinding slowly, slowly, into coarse sand. Before it rose and fell the dark water, seemingly thickened by drifting white bergs and floating fields of ice almost to the point of congealing.

Ak-o-tuk, stupid with food, droned off into a noisy sleep, leaving the women to chatter uninterrupted over their domestic tasks. Along the beach children laughed and screamed in their play with a furry ball, and fat, woolly puppies rolled and snarled and fought mock battles. Before them the dark water beat *boom, boom, boom* against the irregular shore line and sighed audibly back again in retreat through the broken rubble and the coarse gray sand.

There was a great store of meat upon the drying racks before the house of Ak-o-tuk, and there was soon to be more, for even now the hunters were coming in from the sea. Their light skin kayaks, driven by strong arms wielding double bladed paddles, skimmed over the dark water like living sea birds. In the lead, as ever, low under its burden of dead seals, was the kayak of Ta-chau-waq, the mighty hunter.

"Go you," commanded Ak-o-tuk, awakening in the tumult of shouting. "Hurry down there, my daughter, and steady the boat of Ta-chau-waq."

"You see that I am busy," she protested.

"Go!" thundered the angry father. "You dare disobey!"

He heaved himself upward to a sitting posture and fumbled over the rumpled fur robe for his dog whip. Au-let-ah got up from her sewing, angry but obedient, and went down to the water.

"He has many seals," sighed Ak-o-tuk greedily. "The man is a great hunter!"

Though Ta-chau-waq was the first in, he was the last out, because Au-let-ah made no haste to help him; but the fact that she came at all was sufficient to send the hot blood racing through his sinewy body and set his tongue to wagging boastfully.

"I have four seals," he shouted; "enough for two large families!"

The significance of this was not lost upon the girl. She dropped his harpoon

into the water and allowed the boat almost to capsize, in her studied effort to prove to all beholders that she was not a fit wife for any hunter.

"Ak-o-tuk and his family may have two of my seals," he told her, "and I will have plenty left. I can get all the seals I want, any time!"

A skillful hunter, truly, as he should be after thirty years of steady hunting that he might live! He was a tall man for an Eskimo, though somewhat thinner than the average. Long gazing upon the glaring snow and ice had wrinkled his swart face permanently into a ferocious scowl that did not belie his inner self. His little black eyes squinted heavily, his low brow was deeply furrowed. His cheek bones thrust out, his thick lips protruded, the upper one darkened with a thin fringe of coarse black hairs. A stiff blue-black mane, cropped off above his shoulders, blew in a wild tangle about his savage face.

Tireless, enduring, relentless in the pursuit of game, Ta-chau-waq was indeed a mighty hunter—a savage hunter of uncontrollable temper, easily aroused, quickly goaded to hysterical ferocity, and more or less feared by all his savage companions.

"And how many seals did you kill?" he called in a loud, sneering voice to a young hunter, hardly more than a boy, who was just stepping out of a small kayak held by his mother. "How many seals to-day, Ma-tok?"

Whereupon the other hunters roared with noisy laughter, and even some of the women took it up, until their voices beat against the cliff behind them and sent the nesting sea birds rocketing high in the wind above the land.

Ma-tok and his mother bowed their heads in shame and disgrace as they turned away. His hunt, as usual, had been quite unsuccessful.

"Take one of my seals," called Ta-chau-waq, enjoying this baiting of a rival. "I always give to the poor!"

This final insult only made the youth walk the faster, thankful for the partial darkness of his skin *tupik*.

"Ma-tok is young," said a woman. "He will learn."

"His father had the sun power," added an old grandmother. "He did not have to hunt. The boy was to be a shaman and talk with the gods, not to be a hunter of meat."

"The sun does not speak to him yet," said the other woman.

### III

It was true that Ma-tok's father was of the sun. He had a power given to him by his father, who got it from his father, and so on back to unrecorded time. A wonder working shaman was he, who cured the sick, who appeased the gods when they were angry, who brought the game in abundance, who settled all tribal disputes, who could release himself at will from his body and travel afar into strange lands. One night he wandered thus from his body and never came back, though the flesh of him still lay waiting, fully clothed, in its simple rock grave upon the top of the cliff, deep in the always frozen ground.

This same sun power belonged to Ma-tok. It was his by right of heritage, as were all the magic things accumulated by his father and his father's fathers—the curious stones in the form of sea creatures, the mummified little flying animal from the far southland, where these arctic people lived in the long ago, and the bit of flat age-yellow ivory, wider than the widest walrus tusk man ever beheld, whereon was carved the curious beast that somewhat resembled a great walrus with thick legs instead of flippers, except that its tusks curved upward instead of down, and its nose extended like another tail. This last was the most powerful medicine in the shaman's wolverine skin bag, and was never used except to invoke the full power of the sun upon some special and noteworthy occasion.

"My son," comforted Ma-tok's mother, "be not discouraged. It takes time to learn to hunt seals, and we are not hungry. With my long-handled scoop net I have this day caught many little sea birds from the cliff, and there are always rabbits."

"Rabbits!" said Ma-tok in explosive contempt. "I am no longer a child to knock over those dumb, tasteless things and call it hunting!"

"If only your father had come back," she sighed, "there would be no need for you to hunt!"

Truly he was a boy no longer, but a man grown, and thinking, manlike, of the daughter of Ak-o-tuk. When not in such a serious mood, discouraged after an empty hunt, resenting the taunting banter of the village, and jealous of the success of his

older rival, Ma-tok was a smiling, happy youth. His smooth, hairless face was long and plump, his full red lips ever smiling, and his black eyes bright with youth and life.

Now he was sad and lonely and shamed. Had he been a little older when his father died, he too might have lived the easy, care-free existence of a favored shaman of the tribe, to be supported by the other hunters because of his power with the sun; but so far Ma-tok had been unable to prove that the sun recognized him at all. Consequently, until this power came, he was forced to go out and hunt for a living. Not having been trained to this arduous task, he came to it slowly, and, more often than not, he had to live upon the generous bounty of his neighbors.

"It is the kayak," explained he. "It is so unsteady—"

"It takes years of practice and experience," replied the mother, "to hunt from the boat of skin, to harpoon a seal and bring the powerful animal within reach of the dispatching club without upsetting."

"So I have discovered," the son admitted ruefully. "This day I had to be rescued twice!"

But the mother of him knew, as women will, that it was not their lack of seal meat that drove the smiles from her son's youthful face and the joy from his heart. He wanted to kill as much game as Ta-chau-waq, to prove that he was a good provider, to make rich gifts of meat to Ak-o-tuk, to demonstrate that he was a man able to pay a good price for a wife.

It was the father's privilege to choose his own son-in-law. Though all the marriageable men of the village, both young and old, brought him all manner of gifts, the one who paid the biggest price, as Ma-tok well knew, would win the girl. When Ak-o-tuk commanded his daughter to assist with the kayak of Ta-chau-waq, then all the village knew that he had won, and all the village felt sorry for Ma-tok, who had lost.

"I will try once more," said Ma-tok in desperation. "All that I have will I give for her!"

The sun power of his fathers being denied him, there did not seem to be any reason why he should treasure the sacred objects in the old medicine bag. In one last attempt to appease the father of Au-let-ah, he selected the most powerful and valu-

able object therein, and went once more to the *tupik* of Ak-o-tuk.

"Go away!" ordered the fat man.

"Listen!" begged the youth. "I bring you—"

"You can bring me nothing I want—I have everything," said Ak-o-tuk, so full of seal meat that he scarce could articulate. "I am the richest and most important man—"

"You still lack the most precious and valuable thing in all the villages of our tribe."

"Ah-yah!"

"My father was a great shaman, and this was his power."

He handed the flat piece of ancient ivory to Ak-o-tuk, who took it in his pudgy fingers and examined the carving critically.

"The eyes of ordinary people," the youth went on, "were never allowed to rest upon this sacred object of the sun before."

"Hei-yah!" idly commented Ak-o-tuk.

"There never was such a beast as that."

"It was a long time ago."

"Of a surety hunters such as you did not kill them all!" said Au-let-ah's father, roaring at his own joke.

The warm blood surged from the boy's body into his head.

"It is the sun power!" he explained excitedly.

"Keep it, then," sneered Ak-o-tuk, handing it back. "You will need all the power you can get to keep from starving next winter. As for me, I have everything."

That he should refuse so valuable and sacred a gift was utterly unimaginable. The youth had offered his best, his all, and it was refused. With shaking fingers, hardly knowing what he was doing, Ma-tok took the ivory plaque and turned away, with the dark eyes of Au-let-ah hard upon him.

"If you have any meat to spare—" the fat man called after him hoarsely, so that all the village might hear and join his laughter.

#### IV

If meat, huge stores of meat, appealed so strongly to the greed of Ak-o-tuk, then the youth resolved that he should have his fill of it. Ma-tok would prove to them all that he was a capable hunter; that he was learning the ways of the chase; that his

house would always have a store of oil for the stone lamps and plenty of meat for his family and his guests.

A hundred had just returned from spearing seals to report a large herd of walrus in a wide bay about five miles above the village.

"*Eab-twaec-tlec-waugh!*" He shouted the news over the water. "A big herd of walrus!"

Instantly the village was aroused and excited. The skin boats were carried down to the beach. The special gear for hunting these huge aquatic beasts was brought out and hastily inspected.

"All the men are going out to hunt the walrus!" shouted Ma-tok as he rushed to his mother. "I have borrowed from old Ta-ke-te a walrus harpoon and the gear necessary to kill them."

"No, no!" exclaimed his old mother in alarm. "Don't you realize, my son, that this is the most dangerous hunting of all? It is even more dangerous than the killing of *nanook*, the bear!"

"It is true," he admitted, still undaunted; "but I go."

"No—let the others go! It is too dangerous—there will be meat for all!"

"If you had not always tried to keep me from danger," said Ma-tok, and truthfully, "I would not be now the sport of the village."

"I have never forgotten that you are a son of the sun."

"And a most unsuccessful hunter!"

"The sun will give you fame and power."

"Let it be soon," sighed he, "or it will be too late!"

No other hunting in the world requires so much skill and daring as the killing of a full-grown walrus from a frail skin boat with nothing but the crudest stone and ivory weapons. A big bull walrus weighs more than a ton, and is fully fifteen feet long, muscular, thick-skinned, and armed with two powerful ivory tusks projecting downward from the upper jaw. Seemingly a stupid, homely beast, crawling and flopping awkwardly upon the ice, in the water it swims almost as fast and as gracefully as a seal. It is truly a dangerous foe, protected by its thick hide and deep blubber, and deadly ferocious when aroused. Even a full-grown polar bear does not dare to attack a mature walrus.

In a large bay above the village the black

bodies of feeding walrus broke the surface of the water as they came up to breathe after an interval of foraging on the bottom. Broaching like little whales, puffing clouds of steam and water from their broad nostrils, and tossing the dark water into racing circular waves, they rose from the ocean floor, where they turned the sand and muck with their tusks to dislodge the clams and shrimps they fed upon.

Ma-tok never had hunted this big game. He should not have attempted it now, as it was the rule for inexperienced youths to stay back as spectators until they learned how it was done; but he knew that the father of Au-let-ah could be conciliated with nothing but meat, and that he must prove himself a mighty hunter or lose the girl forever. So he hastened to get ready his weapons and commanded his mother to help him with the boat.

The kayaks of the hunters were long, narrow, frail one-man skin canoes, pointed at both ends and completely covered except for an open cockpit in the center, where the hunter sat cross-legged, with the edges of the skin deck covering brought up and tied securely about his waist. This prevented the little boat from being swamped in rough weather. Such a craft, though often awash, rides the water like a duck. If by any chance it is overturned, the hunter, though unable to swim, can right himself quickly with his paddle, without getting seriously wet.

Ta-chau-waq, the best of the hunters, was first away. With his long, double-bladed paddle he drove his light boat swiftly toward the feeding walrus. Beside him were lashed his strong walrus harpoon and an ivory-tipped lance. Behind him, on the skin deck, were an inflated sealskin and a square wooden drag attached to the harpoon line, to mark and hamper the stricken animal once it was securely harpooned.

Another hunter, similarly equipped, pushed out close behind Ta-chau-waq, and then, third in line, was Ma-tok, the others following in their turn. Young was the son of the shaman, in the full vigor and enthusiasm of youth, with a surplus of energy and strength that need not be husbanded. Within half a mile he had overtaken Ta-chau-waq and forced the man into a faster pace to keep the lead.

"Have care!" shouted the older hunter, as they neared the herd. "Keep close behind me, or they will see you."



"Keep behind me, then," called Ma-tok, as he passed his rival. "I shall be the first to strike!"

"May it be your last!" growled the surly one.

## V

DIPPING his paddle first on one side of the kayak and then on the other, Ma-tok flashed over the water behind the feeding herd. Powerful swimmers, even though not alarmed, it required all the strength of his strong arms to overtake them.

Just ahead of him the backs of the feeding beasts, broad, round, and black, rose and swirled through the dark water. Clouds of vapor and spray blew high in the air from their whistling nostrils as they breathed, grunting like huge water pigs, barking hoarsely, keeping up a continuous deep undertone, a hoarse, weird moaning. In the rolling wake behind them, in the churning water about them, the kayaks of the hunters followed fast. The boiling sea attested the size of the huge water creatures and the speed they were making.

Ma-tok, first up with the herd, thinking less of his own safety than of the rich gift of meat he would make to Ak-o-tuk, selected the broad back of a huge bull, and dashed ahead to the spot where the walrus was most like to come up again for air. In one swift motion he laid down his paddle across the bow of the kayak and grasped the heavy harpoon. Then he waited for an instant, while his eager eyes searched the depth below for the first shadow of the rising animal.

Up, up came the round black head, the long, gleaming ivory tusks. The water in front of Ma-tok's canoe rose in a mighty swirl, and a spurt of white vapor spouted high and blew back, wet as rain, into his face. Then the black back curved again through the swirling water for the dive.

In that instant Ma-tok hurled his harpoon. Driven with all the strength of his arm at close range, the ivory tip pierced the thick hide of the bull and buried itself deep in the muscles of its back. As the animal plunged, the wooden shaft disengaged from the barbed ivory head and floated free, and the strong line of walrus hide, lashed firmly to the harpoon head, went hissing out. Instantly Ma-tok threw overboard the inflated sealskin, and then the square drag designed to keep the animal near the surface, and to hamper its

movements in the fight that was sure to follow.

The wounded bull came swiftly back to the surface, thrashing and churning the water, roaring in anger and pain, as the kayak turned sharply about and dashed out of his way. Then down, down he went into the dark sea, dragging the inflated sealskin and the wooden drag far out of sight.

Ta-chau-waq was fast to another animal, his sealskin float skimming away over the surface as the stricken young cow fled. The other hunters were unable to get up in time, but stood by to help kill the two that were harpooned.

Presently Ma-tok's bull came up, roaring and whistling. He charged the sealskin float and lashed at it with thrusting tusks, but it bobbed away. The other animals of the herd turned back to help him, advancing toward the kayaks, bellowing, their eyes burning red with rage.

Unable to dive deep or to swim fast away, because of the floats and drags, the two wounded walruses turned at bay, facing the canoes. They were backed by the entire herd, arrayed in a threatening circle of defense—pugnacious, defiant, all of them splashing and bellowing. Now it required all the courage of a brave and skillful hunter, lashed in a frail skin boat, to dash through this ring of ivory-armed heads and lance the wounded animals.

Ta-chau-waq, having had much experience in walrus hunting, paddled up, shouting and beating the water with his paddle, trying to make the threatening animals dive, only to dash quickly away to one side when an angry bull charged.

Ma-tok tried a similar maneuver, but the harpooned bull charged in a mad rush, his huge bulk thrust half out of the water. The youth skillfully thrust his kayak aside and then turned quickly behind the walrus, to use his lance as the enraged animal passed. The rush of the bull carried him by, and the inflated sealskin, skimming the surface behind him, caught the kayak and tipped it over in a twinkling, so that Ma-tok, lashed firmly in position, hung for an instant head down in the water, at the mercy of any animal that charged.

With his paddle, the young hunter strove desperately to right himself; but in that same instant the wounded bull charged again and crashed down upon the forward part of the skin boat, ripping the taut skin covering and crushing the bone framework.

Ma-tok, who could not swim, felt the cold water engulf him.

"Sun!" he cried. "Oh, sun, pity me now and help me!"

Quickly he slipped the knots that lashed him to the cockpit and struggled to get out, hardly realizing that he would be helpless in the open water; but the impact of the float against the kayak and the pull of the wooden drag were sufficient to break the harpoon line—which was an old one—and by a lucky chance the float bobbed up within reach of his arms.

Two other hunters, roaring at Ma-tok's misfortune, came up swiftly to help him. One of them seized the trailing harpoon line that dangled from the float, and fastened it to his kayak. The other passed a line around the half submerged boat, which was buoyed up by the air in the unbroken stern, and they dragged both back out of the danger zone. Slowly they towed the luckless youth and his broken kayak to the near-by shore.

Ma-tok, to his middle in the shallow water, realized that he had lost everything. The loud laughter of the other hunters rang over the water, and loudest of all was the voice of Ta-chau-waq.

"Walk home!" he shouted. "You can carry all your meat!"

The heartbroken youth dragged his broken kayak upon the sand and cached it safely upon high rocks, until such time as he might return with his simple tools and mend it. He was wet and cold and disgraced, and many miles from home.

## VI

THE kill of Ta-chau-waq weighed nearly a ton. The round body of the huge sea beast was wrinkled and creased like old rubber, its feet were developed into powerful flippers, its broad muzzle was guarded with long, coarse bristles. A little while before it had been diving and swimming, foraging on the bottom; now it was dead. It would have sunk of its own weight except for two inflated sealskins lashed to its stiffening body, so that it could be towed back to the village and hauled out on the beach, to be cut up for food.

"Never was a family so well fed!" boasted the proud hunter.

"No, never," agreed Ak-o-tuk.

"Ever since the sun came back to stay," went on Ta-chau-waq, "I have kept your racks heavy with meat."

"It is true," admitted Ak-o-tuk. "You are the best hunter of them all."

"You are fat, your family is fat, your dogs are fat. I have proved myself and paid the price. Now I claim your girl!"

"Wait," interrupted Ak-o-tuk—not that he disapproved the match, but he feared that when the girl was gone all these generous gifts would cease. "I am not quite content."

"Is there no limit to your greed?" spoke the hunter sternly. "Certainly I have paid more than enough already!"

"Not yet." Ak-o-tuk tried to be gruff and stern—a difficult pose for one so fat and content with life. "In a little while—"

"In a little while I shall come and take her!" cried Ta-chau-waq angrily.

"There are others—"

"There won't be if they stand in my way," threatened the hunter.

Ak-o-tuk, feeling himself fast losing face, got up with difficulty, puffing and blowing, and making a great show of anger.

"It is for me to say when my daughter goes to your *tupik*."

"It is time you said it, then!"

"At my own pleasure," roared Ak-o-tuk. "You cannot drive me like a dog."

"The roars of *nanook* never kept me from using the lance!"

The loud voices of the two men soon brought all the villagers, men, women, and children, all talking at once, running up from the walrus cutting. Most of them sided with Ta-chau-waq, who had been very patient, and had more than fulfilled the law in such matters.

"Very well, then," granted Ak-o-tuk, weakening.

"*Eeeei-hei!*" exclaimed Ta-chau-waq, rejoicing. "I shall prepare a great feast. I shall—"

"Look! Look!" cried a boy. "Here comes Ma-tok!"

Down the beach toward them came Ma-tok, running as if pursued by enemies.

"Ill luck pursues him," sneered Ta-chau-waq. "He may run, but he will never get away from it."

"He is hurrying home with his meat," jested another. "We shall all be as fat as Ak-o-tuk when Ma-tok gets here!"

They joked and laughed as the youth raced down the beach toward them. Breathless, his hurrying feet sloshing in wet boots, visibly excited, he dashed up to the rock where Ak-o-tuk sat resting.

"You wanted meat," he cried eagerly.  
 "Then I give you a whale!"

## VII

HAULING his damaged kayak out of the cold sea water, Ma-tok made what haste he could to escape the taunts and derisive laughter of his companions. He drained the skin boat of water and placed it atop a high rock, weighting it down with heavy stones so it could not blow away. When this was done, he ran from the spot as if still in fear of the demons of the sea, who but a few minutes before were pulling him down into their cold, dark domain. The village was five miles distant by water, but nearer eleven by the route Ma-tok must take to walk back along the irregular coast line.

Sad and discouraged, wet and cold, he ran to keep warm, dreading to go back at all, knowing that everything was hopelessly lost. There was nowhere else for him to go. Only in the winter, when there was ice and snow for the sledges, could they visit the other villages scattered far up and down the coast, lest the drain upon the animal life necessary for the very existence of their people be too severe in any one place.

As he ran, stumbling over the rough stones, Ma-tok sang his prayer to the sun:

*"Aya, pity me!  
 Oh, sun, pity me!  
 Look down upon me  
 And give me power—  
 Power of my fathers!  
 Aya, aya-ah!"*

A small flock of little gray birds went whistling by—a good sign, but he did not see them. Seven spotted ptarmigan flushed before him—the lucky number. They flew to the east—which is also good, but he did not notice. Through a rift in the dark sky the sun made a broad pathway down to the sea; but, his eyes on the ground, he failed to see this fourth omen of good fortune.

Where the sea beat against the sheer gray cliff he was forced to leave the shore line and climb laboriously to the barren plateau above. It was a long, hard climb, up and up, with shrieking birds dashing around his head on threatening wings. He reached the top at last, the naked, rocky roof of the world, where the only sign of life was a dark band of big black ravens fluttering down out of the sky before him.

The climb had taken his breath, so now he walked and was warm again. He saw before him the noisy ravens, beating up and down, fluttering high and low, tremendously excited about something hidden from his sight by the rocks between him and the sea. Following the coast line he came nearer and nearer, until their black pinions flapped and whistled close to his head, fluttering in his very face, as if to drive him away, to keep something from him.

Not daring to harm these sacred birds, Ma-tok shouted to them to beware; but their actions excited his curiosity. He climbed over the rocks until he could see the rocky beach, and there in the shallows lay a dead whale. A glance was sufficient to show that it had been recently killed, and that a harpoon and a lance were still fastened in the huge creature's back. By right of discovery this great store of meat was his.

"If it is meat Ak-o-tuk wants," he shouted, "I will give him enough to last forever!"

He scrambled down from the rock and raced away toward the village.

## VIII

"A WHALE?" repeated Ak-o-tuk.

"Yes, a monster of a whale!" cried Ma-tok.

"I suppose you have just caught it," jeered Ta-chau-waq.

"It is already caught," explained the youth. "It is a dead whale, and has floated conveniently up to the shore."

"A whale!" exclaimed the hunters. "A dead whale!"

"One-half of this mountain of meat I give to Ak-o-tuk," proclaimed Ma-tok. "The rest of the creature is to be divided among you all. I claim for myself only the hunting rig and the rope I saw trailing from the body."

"Hei!" exclaimed Ta-chau-waq. "You have the crazy wind in your head. There are no men anywhere strong enough to kill a whale."

"You shall see!" cried Ma-tok. "Come!"

All the villagers able to travel so far ran along the beach to the place where Ma-tok said the dead whale was ashore. With them went Ta-chau-waq, jealous and angry, enraged because his rival had secured more meat than he.

"Wait!" called Ak-o-tuk, puffing ahead

a few steps, then stopping for breath and hating to be left behind. "Why should I tire myself? Half of it is mine, anyway."

Men, women, and children, they stood on the rocks in awe before the great body of the dead whale. A monstrous black bulk, almost too large to be a living creature, it rolled gently in the land swell, the restless arctic sea dashing and foaming against its rounded side.

Fastened in the broad back of it, for all to see, was the hunting gear that Ma-tok claimed. Projecting above skin and blubber was the eyed shaft of an iron whale harpoon, with a long yellow rope trailing away into the dark depths. A little way forward of this was the wooden shaft of a whale lance, with its malleable iron haft bent at a right angle and its steel blade deep in the sea creature's body.

"Men have killed it," said one. "Somewhere there are hunters who dare attack a whale."

"I asked the sun for power," began Ma-tok, "and—"

"You were just lucky enough to find it," sneered Ta-chau-waq. "It's only a lot of dog meat, at that."

"Whale meat is good," said an old man. "I remember when we found one."

"Take what you want of it," commanded Ma-tok. "There is plenty for all."

"But how?" asked a woman, gazing at the rough water that lay between.

"Throw in rocks," answered Ma-tok, "until we can walk across to the whale's body."

They built a causeway of stones, casting them into the water until they bridged the gap. Then Ma-tok led the way out upon the monster's broad back and began to cut out the harpoon. It proved a long and tedious job, for he had nothing but a big flint knife lashed to a bone handle. Many times was it necessary to rechip the blade, and thus sharpen it, before he had cut down through the thick hide and blubber and thus into the firm muscles where the steel harpoon head was firmly embedded; but at last he drew it forth.

"See!" he cried. "It is very like our own, but of ironstone instead of ivory."

"The rope is strange," remarked one of the Eskimos.

"It is a curious rope," said Ma-tok. "It must be very strong, to hold a whale."

They all assisted to recover the inch-

and-a-half manila rope attached to the harpoon. With their united strength they dragged it slowly ashore, water-soaked, heavy, coming in slowly to the pull of their strong bodies. As it came in, Ma-tok coiled it on the rock, higher and higher, until at last, when many hundred feet of line had been recovered, the mass of it was higher than a man's head.

"Never did any one ever see so much harpoon line!" exclaimed a hunter. "Where could men live who hunt the whales thus?"

"Who knows?"

"With this harpoon and rope we also can catch whales," said Ma-tok. "Look, here is the very lance to kill them with!"

Ma-tok seized the lance. To his utmost surprise, the iron haft of it easily bent back straight again.

"You see," he cried, "this ironstone bends!"

"It could not bend!"

"It does!"

"Then it is not the ironstone that will break, but never bends."

"Perhaps it is a new kind of ironstone," suggested another.

Ma-tok put forth his strength and drew the lance out—a wooden handle, a long, round malleable iron haft, and to this a spade-shaped steel blade almost as sharp as a razor.

"This is a lance!" he cried.

He tried it on the dead body of the whale, and in his strong arms the sharp lance tip seemed, to one familiar only with dull stone and ivory tools, to flow like water through the animal's flesh.

"With this I can kill many whales!" he said exultingly.

"You couldn't kill anything," taunted Ta-chau-waq from the shore.

Then it was that the youth saw, farther back in the whale's body, a round iron rod as thick as his middle finger, protruding from the black skin.

"Here is another—a broken lance!" he exclaimed.

He grasped it and pulled, but it was firmly embedded. With the sharp lance in his hand, using it as a spud, he quickly chopped down into the body around the iron rod until there was revealed an egg-shaped bulb of corrugated iron, larger than his two fists, and before it a sharp, angular, revolving spearhead.

"A different kind of lance," said Ma-tok, pulling it out; "but the handle is



broken and lost. It looks more like a harpoon." With a laugh he turned to the surly Ta-chau-waq, who stood apart upon the rocks, and handed it to him. "You all see!" laughed Ma-tok. "I who am rich give to the poor!"

The act itself, his own words being hurled back into his teeth, was sufficient to enrage the discomfited and jealous hunter to the point of madness.

"You scraper of old skins!" he shouted, hysterical with anger. "You woman's helper! You have to find your meat dead, like a raven!" However, he kept the curious and valuable piece of iron in his greedy fist. "You never could kill anything larger than a rabbit!"

"With this harpoon and lance I shall kill other whales," declared Ma-tok.

"You shall never hunt again—nothing—never!" roared Ta-chau-waq. "I shall kill you myself right now!"

"Words fly backward from your mouth," returned Ma-tok, bold enough now. "The sun has recognized me at last, and I fear no man."

"The sun!" sneered Ta-chau-waq, poisoning his heavy walrus lance as if about to hurl it, but the distance was too great. "Come out here on the rocks and see if the sun will protect you from my lance!"

"With gladness," answered Ma-tok, the long whale lance of steel and iron in his brown hands. "The sun will destroy you!"

"You and your sun magic! I shall knock you on the head with this broken harpoon of ironstone and throw you into the sea!"

Ma-tok pushed the other hunters out of his way and advanced to the rocky causeway, his lance advanced before him, ready to guard and thrust.

When Ta-chau-waq saw that the youth was in earnest, and would fight, he was glad. Strong were his arms and skilled in the use of the lance. Many times he had faced *nanook*, the bear, with nothing but

this lance in his hands. Surely he had nothing to fear from this weak and inexperienced youth! By a strange twist of luck the boy had bested him in the getting of meat, and now was rich with new and strange weapons; but he would eliminate this dangerous rival and claim his wealth by right of combat.

"Come on, dog-face!" he roared. "Come on and fight me!"

"Oh, sun!" began Ma-tok, under his breath, as he advanced cautiously over the narrow causeway. "Help me to destroy this evil man!"

"I shall take all your meat and your new whale gear!" shouted Ta-chau-waq.

Lashing himself into a mad frenzy of hate, the mighty hunter still held in his left hand the curious whale weapon of black iron. Needing both hands to use his heavy walrus lance, in savage, berserk rage he cast this insulting gift down upon the hard rock at his feet.

"Meet death!" he roared, as his arm swung down.

"Oh, sun!" Ma-tok prayed again. "Give me power."

There came a flash of greenish yellow light that blinded in a sheet of living flame, that seemed to spurt up from the rock high into the leaden sky above, while their ears resounded to a terrific, roaring blast that sent them staggering back, with stinging bits of stone raining into their terrified faces.

Before the eyes of Ma-tok, as he advanced along the rocky bridge with the long whale lance on guard, the broken body of his mad opponent whirled backward through the air and down into the foaming sea, as the heavy charge of cordite in the unexploded whale bomb detonated with the impact when the enraged hunter cast it upon the rock at his feet.

"The sun power!" cried Au-let-ah, while no one was able to comprehend just what had happened. "Ma-tok has received the sun power!"

### CONTACT

My friend is living in a distant land,  
But any moment I may touch his hand,  
And feel his pulsing heart.  
My enemy is dwelling at my door,  
But I may never know him any more,  
For we are worlds apart.

James Larkin Pearson

# The Vanity of Jane Thurston

TELLING HOW A LEADING LADY WHO CAREFULLY CONCEALED  
THE FACT THAT SHE HAD A GROWN SON WAS SUDDENLY  
CONFRONTED WITH A STILL MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM

By John Peter Toohey

"LET me see—you're forty-six, aren't you?" said Mabel Marlowe, and Jane Thurston winced at the frank directness of the question. It was an intrusion that she would have resented bitterly from any one but Mabel.

"Yes," she replied quietly, "I'm forty-six. There's no use in dissembling with you."

"You bet your sweet life there isn't, my dear!" returned the other woman. "I 'knew you when,' you know. Of course you don't look it by quite a few years when you're on the stage, but you *are* getting a bit—well, matronly, I suppose, is the word. I rather fancy they must have noticed it." "They! Whom do you mean by 'they'?"

"Why, Henderson and the other managers—and the critics, too. Didn't Bartlett say something about 'a certain air of settled maturity' in his review of 'Ironies'?"

"Maybe he did. I don't remember. Is there anything else unpleasant that you're going to dig up this morning?"

Jane made an impatient gesture and looked out of the window at the fresh greenness of Central Park. Mabel Marlowe was unabashed.

"I've only just begun," she replied. "It's about time some one made you face a few unpleasant truths. You've been kidding yourself long enough. You've got to make up your mind once and for all that you're definitely and decisively out of the leading woman class. You can't go on expecting to get parts where you come to a clinch with the leading man just as the curtain falls. That's all shoved behind you, so far as Broadway is concerned. You might get a couple of seasons in stock out in Toledo or Louisville on the strength of

your name, but when you came back here you'd find yourself a has-been, and when you signed on the dotted line you'd find a couple of hundred dollars lopped off the little old salary. Is this part they've offered you any good?"

"Of course it's a good part. What did you think it was—a bit in the last act?"

There was irritation in the sharpness of Jane's tone. Mabel chuckled.

"I can see I'm getting under your skin," she commented cheerfully. "It had to be done. Pardon my frankness, but are they offering you your regular salary?"

"They wouldn't dare do anything else!" replied the other woman, assuming an air of dignified hauteur which she instantly regretted when she looked into the mocking eyes of her friend.

"Listen, my dear—don't pull any of that grand lady stuff on me. It won't go. You haven't worked all season, and now they've offered you a good part at your regular salary in a Broadway production, and you won't take it because you'd have to play a mother. You're a fool, Jane! Why, I played mothers at thirty-five."

"But this woman is supposed to be the mother of a boy of twenty-two."

"Well, so are you, if it comes to that."

Jane Thurston drew her shoulders up and visibly shuddered.

"It only needed that reminder to complete my morning's happiness," she said resentfully.

"Well, some one ought to bring it up occasionally, for the good of your soul. Have you heard from Jack lately?"

The other woman's lower lip quivered.

"It's been six months," she said, bravely trying to hide her all too obvious distress. "Please—I'd rather not talk about him."

Her friend calmly ignored her protest.

"Where was he?" Mabel persisted.

"Chicago this time. I wrote him there, but he doesn't reply to my letters for months. The last message was just a note written from some unspeakable cheap hotel. He didn't say what he was doing. There were no complaints—he just told me to cheer up. I'd asked him in my letter to come back home, and pleaded with him, but he didn't mention that at all."

"Bully for him! I'm glad he's got pride enough to resent the way you treated him. My God, hasn't this precious vanity of yours caused you enough trouble already, without letting yourself in for any more?"

"You don't understand, Mabel—you never understood."

"Oh, fudge and fiddlesticks! That's your old stock speech—nobody understood! What was there to understand? Simply that you were ashamed to have it known that you had a grown-up son. You were afraid that it would hurt your career, and that you'd be considered older than you look. I understood that, didn't I?—and I understood his misery and distress at being kept under cover and not being permitted to claim you as a mother. I understood—"

"But you don't—"

"Just a minute, my dear! You're not going to butt in until I've finished. As I was saying, I understood how much he wanted to let his friends know you *were* his mother, how proud he was of you in his quiet, silent way. You understood it, too, but your damned vanity prevented you from giving way to your real feelings, and you forced him to run away from it all."

"You're heartless, Mabel. I didn't force him. It's cruel of you to say that he—"

Jane's voice trailed off into a choky gasp. She stood up and walked to the other side of the living room, in an effort to control her feelings.

"Well, I won't go into *that* any more if it's going to get you all worked up," said her friend, a shade more gently; "but I'm going to keep drilling home what I said before about your damned foolishness in even thinking of refusing this part they've offered you. You'd better call George Henderson up right now and take it."

"I'll do nothing of the sort! I won't—I can't play the part of a middle-aged woman—yet."

"You'll find you'll have to, if you want to keep this"—Mabel Marlowe indicated the cheerful living room with a sweeping gesture. "You'll miss this out in Toledo or Des Moines, or wherever you'll have to go. For the love of Pete, try and be sensible! I know it's sort of tragic when you take the first step and burn your bridges behind you, but it really isn't as important as you imagine. You'll get reconciled to it easily enough. I know I did. The youngsters are knocking at the door, Jane, and you and Mona Meredith and Alison Benson and the other old girls have got to step aside and let them in. Mona's rehearsing a character part—some sort of an old hag. She's burned *her* bridges."

"She should have done it years ago," retorted the other woman impatiently. "I hope you don't compare me to her! I saw her at the Albemarle the other day, and she was perfectly ridiculous with that absurd yellow hair and that neck of hers. It looked like a piece of leather—like a choice *old* piece of leather, if you ask me."

"Well, I didn't ask you. If I wanted an honest expression of opinion about a sister actress, I wouldn't ask you or any other woman on the stage. I'm going. When I'm out of sight, take a good long look at yourself in the mirror, turn to the right, pick up the telephone, and tell George Henderson that you'll be delighted to play that part. If you don't do just that thing, I promise you that two years from now, when you come limping back to town from the tall grass, you won't get any sympathy from me. I'll pull the good old line 'I told you so.' Think it over!"

Jane Thurston found it difficult to retain her mood of irritation. It was dissolved by the friendliness of her friend's frank eyes as Mabel stood up to say good-by. She enveloped the other woman's plump person with a slender arm.

"You're an annoying old dear," she said, "but you mean well. I'm not going to do what you suggest, though. I'm going to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer!"

## II

UNCONSCIOUSLY swayed by the suggestion of her departed friend, Jane presently found herself looking at her reflection in the long mirror in her dressing room. Of course, she admitted to herself, there *were* a number of tiny lines etched about the

deep-seated gray eyes, the contour of her cheeks was somewhat marred by a certain flabbiness, and her neck wasn't quite as slender as it had been years before; but the general effect was not unpleasing—decidedly not.

She had not bobbed her hair, and this critical inspection confirmed her belief that she had been wise in defying the prevailing custom. Its soft, dark masses, artfully bestowed about her forehead and her ears, softened her face and shadowed many of the telltale lines. She might not have the fresh loveliness of youth, she told herself, but she was distinctly not a middle-aged woman yet. There was no reason why she should play matrons for several years to come. She would show Mabel how ridiculously mistaken she was.

Murray Phelps, Jane's agent, wasn't encouraging over the telephone a few minutes later.

"There's nothing yet in your regular line here in New York, Miss Thurston," he told her. "Henderson's holding that part. He thinks you'll come around, but you've got to decide before Saturday. I'd take it if I were you."

"How about that lead in the new Hargrave play we spoke about yesterday?" she inquired.

"I had them on the wire a little while ago. They've engaged Betty Wilson for that. They said you—well, I suppose I might as well be frank—they said you wouldn't be quite in the picture. I heard this morning about a stock company they're organizing for a spring season in Columbus. They're looking for a leading woman, and I might arrange a special engagement for you. You could do some of your old plays, and they'd probably feature you big. Would that interest you?"

"It would not," she replied irritably, and hung up the receiver with a vicious slam.

For a moment she fancied how Mabel Marlowe would gloat had she heard this conversation. Columbus! Stock companies! Jane had had enough of that sort of thing twenty years ago, before she had come into her own on Broadway. She remembered the drudgery of it, the weekly change of bill, the daily rehearsals, the fuss and worry about wardrobe, the sleepless nights devoted to studying lines, the machinelike routine of the performances. She couldn't go back to that!

A mood of restlessness seized her, and she began a nervous, undirected prowling about the apartment. It pleased her to find dust in hidden corners of the tables and behind the books on the shelves, and she found an outlet for some of her irritation in scolding Nora, the good-natured Irishwoman who for the last year had served her as general maid.

In her bedroom her restless eyes caught a glimpse of an old photograph of her son on the bureau, and suddenly she found herself gazing at it with a fondness that ironed out the tenseness of her former mood. What a sturdy little fellow he had been during those years at the military academy, and how proud of his uniform!

She could remember the morning when that photograph had been taken. He had wanted her to pose with him, but she had recoiled from the suggestion. She was still playing ingénue leads, and she had decided that there must be no photographic record of the existence of any child of hers. How carefully she had kept him hidden all these years! It had been an obsession with her. Only a few of her intimates knew about him, and they had been exactingly pledged to secrecy.

With a pang of anguish she recalled the day when he revolted against her tyranny. His shy remonstrances and pleadings had given way to flaming rebellion. She had insistently driven him out of the living room upon the arrival of a group of friends for tea, and when they had gone he had come stalking in on her, blazing with rage. The echo of his reproachful words, pitched in a high, hysterical key, came back vividly to her now.

"A little child—that's the way you treat me—like a little child who's got to be put to bed when company comes! I'm sick of it, I tell you, sick and tired of it all, and I'll make you sorry you ever did it! I'll make you sorry—you'll see!"

And he had. He had stamped out into the hall and down to his own room, like a spoiled child. That night, when she came home from the theater, there was a note on her dressing table. He was going away, he wrote, and she wouldn't see him again for years and years. He'd be a somebody, or he'd know the reason why. He'd make her proud to claim him as a son when he finally returned.

That was three years ago, and she had not seen him since. She had spent those



years in defending herself against the inner realization that she had been unjust and heartless. She had found a dozen plausible justifications for her conduct, but every time she came upon one of his brief letters in the morning she wept bitterly in an agony of regret. She did so now as she swayed and slipped down upon her lace-covered bed.

### III

MABEL MARLOWE called up the next morning, and continued her campaign.

"I see they've engaged Betty Wilson for that lead in Oscar Hargrave's new play," she remarked. "Youth's being served again, my dear. You'd better get in out of the rain while the going's good."

Jane hung up the phone in a rush of irritation, and then called up five minutes later to apologize.

Her restlessness increased. She tried to work it off by a walk around the reservoir in Central Park, but when she returned she was more nervous and jumpy than ever. She lay down in her room and tried to read, but she found her thoughts wandering from the printed page, and tossed the magazine impatiently away. It was four o'clock when she happened to drop into a fitful slumber.

She awakened to find Nora standing at the bedside. There was a worried look on the maid's fat, kindly face, and she was twisting her white apron.

"I'm glad you wakened, ma'am," she said. "Knowin' you're kind of uneasy like, I knew you needed the rest, and I didn't know what to do."

Jane sat up suddenly. She sensed that something unpleasant was in the air.

"What is it?" she inquired anxiously.

"There's some one to see you out in the livin' room. I tried to keep him out in the hall, but he wouldn't have that at all. He forced himself in. He had a—well, I guess I'd better not say anything about *that*. He wouldn't give me any name—just said to say it was Mr. Jack."

"Mr. Jack! It isn't—it can't be—"

Her voice choked and her heart pounded furiously.

She pushed the startled Nora aside and darted through the hall.

She found him standing at one of the windows, plucking nervously at the curtain. His shoulders had a sag that bespoke utter dejection. He was in her arms before he

had time to turn around. It was pleasant to find him gripping her, for a moment, with the fierce intensity of a troubled child. A wave of emotion engulfed her, and tears spilled from her eyes in a sudden gush.

"Home again, dear!" she murmured chokily. "I'm so glad—so thankful!"

He let his arms drop and moved back a step or two. The misery that was written on his face was not dispelled by the wan, sickly smile that lay upon it for a moment before he spoke again.

"I had to come," he said dully. "There wasn't any other way. I thought it all out. I was going to be a somebody, but I'm just a wash-out—just a total wash-out."

A bitter laugh escaped him. The sound of it seared his mother's raw nerve ends. She took his arm and gently led him to the sofa. She sank into it and pulled him down beside her.

"You've got a lot to tell me, dear," she said in a low tone. "Remember what I used to say when you were a little boy—it's best to get the worst things over first. Get it all out. I shall understand."

"I hope you will. My gosh, I hope you will!"

He looked up at her pleadingly, and the expression in his eyes was like what she remembered seeing in those of a frightened dog she had once owned.

"I'm—I'm married"—he gulped on the words—"and she's—she's dead!"

He turned away to hide his emotion. Through a daze of bewilderment she could hear his smothered sobs. She said nothing for awhile, holding him tight.

Presently he controlled himself. He pulled a crumpled handkerchief from his pocket and furtively dabbed his eyes.

"I'm sorry, dear," she murmured.

"Would I have liked her?"

"Liked her? You'd have *loved* her!" His voice blazed with sudden enthusiasm in a half choked rush of words. "She looked like you—same hair, same eyes—kind of tall like you, too. I guess maybe that's why I fell in love with her."

She tingled at this, and pressed a restless hand which she found groping for her own.

"Tell me how it happened," she urged gently.

"I met her in Cleveland." His voice was trembling now. "I had a job with a construction company there, and she was one of the stenographers. Maybe it was

foolish to get married without having anything saved up, but we just couldn't help it. We didn't think about anything except each other. My gosh, mother, but we were happy!"

She couldn't bear to watch the sad, twisted smile that lay upon his face. She turned away.

"Cleveland? But you wrote me from Chicago."

"Yes—we moved out there after awhile. My firm sent me. We lived in a hotel—kind of a cheap one, because I wasn't making much, but she didn't mind. She was bully about it—used to cook breakfast every morning in the room, and she made just the best coffee anybody ever drank. I guess *nobody* ever made coffee like that. I wanted to write and tell you about everything, but somehow I couldn't. I was afraid—afraid it would worry you, and I decided to wait and bring her on here, when I got the chance, and let you see her yourself and find out how wonderful she was. And then—then it happened."

The tears came again, but he resolutely choked them back.

"What was it, dear? Was it sudden?"

"I can't talk about that—yet. I've got—I've got something I must show you first."

"Something you must show me?" she asked wonderingly.

He hung his head and stood up.

"Please—please try to understand and be nice, mother—please try to be nice!"

"Please try to be nice"—the phrase came back to her as an echo from the past. It was what he used to say as a little boy when he was on the verge of a confession.

She rose and followed him, in bewilderment, out into the hall.

"I guess we'll have to go in the kitchen," he said.

She permitted herself to be led, uncomprehending. He held the swinging kitchen door open, and she passed through. Nora was at the window. She had what seemed to be a white bundle in her arms. She turned as they entered, and Jane Thurston caught a glimpse of tiny arms in restless movement.

"A baby!" she murmured, incredulous. "Is it yours?"

"I'll say it is!" There was a ring of pride in Jack's voice. "And I guess she's just about the finest baby you ever saw.

Her name is Margaret, but I'm going to call her Peggy after her mother."

"She's a darling duck, ma'am," volunteered Nora enthusiastically. "Not a whimper out of her, and I'm thinkin' it's considerable maulin' she's had to put up with. The young man doesn't seem to know very much about the way to hold her."

Jane took the white bundle in her arms with quick eagerness, and touched a pink cheek with her lips. Strange emotions agitated her.

"Peggy!" she murmured. "Yes, we'll call her that. It's a lovely name. How old is she?"

"Just six weeks," replied Jack. "The other Peggy—her mother—died in the hospital. I couldn't put her in a home, and I thought maybe—maybe you wouldn't mind taking charge of her and helping me bring her up. Please try to be nice, mother! Please try!"

Nora's broad face beamed.

"Your grandchild, is it, ma'am?" she inquired. "Well, may God save and bless us all this day!"

"You will be nice, mother, now won't you?"

There was the urgency of desperation in Jack's voice. A great tenderness enveloped Jane Thurston as she freed an arm and drew him toward her.

"I couldn't be anything else, dear," she said. "It will be a great happiness for us all."

A faint wail arose from the white bundle, and the tiny arms moved more rapidly.

"I guess maybe she's hungry," explained the young father. "She hasn't had anything to eat since I fed her on the train, four hours ago. There's some milk in my bag. I'll get it."

He darted for the hall. Nora stretched out her plump arms.

"Let me feed her, ma'am," she pleaded. "It's been thirty years since I've had a chance to fuss over one of them. I'll bring her in to you when she falls asleep."

Jane kissed the pink cheek again and relinquished the white bundle. The young father persisted in superintending the feeding, and his mother moved out into the hall. She wanted to be alone for a few minutes.

She dropped into a big chair in the living room and tried to think rationally about the events of the last ten minutes. It

seemed as if she had lived through years in that time. Her Jack married and a father—and a widower! Somehow, to her, "widower" had always connoted an elderly and settled man. She smiled at the idea.

Jack married and a father! And she was a grandmother! She straightened up suddenly. In the excitement she had forgotten that. She ruefully remembered the traditional grandmother so beloved of all artists—a dear old lady with spectacles and gray hair, white ruching about her neck, and a benevolent smile. She shuddered at the image.

Her gaze wandered to a calendar on the writing desk at her side. She saw that it was Friday. She hesitated for a moment, and then reached for the telephone. A minute later she was talking to George Henderson.

"I've decided to take that part," she said quietly. "Of course it's understood that I'm to be featured?"

The echoes of his assurances were still in her ears when her son came into the room. The worried look had vanished from his face.

"You're bully, mother, just bully!" he said. "She was terribly hungry, and she's going to sleep. It'll be good to know that

she's safe and well cared for when I'm back in Chicago."

"Back in Chicago?" she echoed.

"Sure! I have to go back to my job to-morrow."

"You've got to do nothing of the sort!" Her tone was commanding. "You're going to give up that job and get another here, and then you can help me take care of Peggy."

"But you won't—you wouldn't—I couldn't stand being treated—oh, you know what I mean! You wouldn't really want me around."

"Oh, that's all—that's all shoved behind me. I won't mind in the least. You're really some one to be proud of, Jack. There won't be any more of *that*; only you'll have to promise me one thing. We won't say anything about Peggy yet to any one but just a few friends. We'll keep her for ourselves."

"All right," he said reluctantly. "It won't be so *terribly* long before we can sort of show her off, will it?"

"No—not so *terribly* long. Just leave that to me."

She was glad that Jack had been reasonable. It made the future a little more bearable.

### A VICTORIAN PLAIN

Now leave the jazz and movie show,  
The roads where whizzing motors go,  
And learn the joys of gentler mood,  
The lovely, lamp-lit solitude,  
The sweet seclusion all must seek  
Who learn to read a book a week.

But what, in choosing fifty-two,  
Can a bewildered mortal do,  
When full ten thousand books, no less,  
Came off the last year's printing press?  
At such a rate we can't be in it  
Unless we read a book a minute!

Go to! The old are still the best—  
Shakespeare, the Bible, the Saint's Rest,  
Keats and Carlyle and Scott and Poe,  
The glorious ones of long ago—  
Ah, these are yet the shrines to seek  
When we would read a book a week!

W. B. Blake

# The Little Love Ships

A ROMANCE OF ALASKAN WATERS—THE STORY OF THE  
STRANGE MESSAGES BORNE TO AND FRO BY THE  
DANGEROUS CURRENTS OF CHUCK HYAK

By Herman Howard Matteson

DAVE was disappointed. Moreover, he was a little worried. This was the first daytime flood tide in weeks that had not brought him a *tenas canim tikegh* from Myena, the little singer, who lived on Memaloost Island, ten miles up the channel. *Tenas canim tikegh*, in the Indian vernacular of southeastern Alaska, means "little love ship." Myena always launched her letters on the very first of the flood, the reason being that after the tide got under way in Chuck Hyak no boat could weather its destroying turbulence. Many a man and many a boat had been swallowed down by the thousand hungry mouths of the dangerous channel.

Dave Rowley had a little camp on the rocky bank of Chuck Hyak. He was employed by the loggers' association to patrol the narrow channel, his duty being to row through it when the tide was at slack and roll from the rocks any logs that had been cast ashore by the swirl of the flood waters. Every day, just as the tide began to flood gently from Memaloost, Myena would send Dave a letter. Dave, ever alert, would spot the missive where it came floating down the stream, row out, fetch it in, and devour it. His answer he would then launch when the tide turned back toward Memaloost.

Dave and Myena, cut off from the white world, with only Indians for neighbors, saw no one of their kind save the vagrant beach comber, or the fisherman and loggers faring past in tug or dory. Only occasionally did they see each other. The arrival of the love ships, therefore, were events. Chuck Hyak, the terrible, they had tamed to be their messenger.

The method by which the little vessels were freighted with their precious cargo

was simple and ingenious. Dave had split out some cedar shakes from a log cut. The cedar, bright in color, was as buoyant as a cork. The letters, filled with the fond trivialities in which lovers delight, were inclosed in clam shells, and the edges of each shell were dipped in melted pitch. The shell, thus made as tight as a bottle, were fastened to the cedar board with thongs, and the thongs anchored in place with more of the melted pitch.

Then the little ship would be launched, with the comparatively heavy clam shell underneath it, so that beach combers and fishermen would see only a worthless cedar shake afloat. So unerringly did the tides surge and resurge from Memaloost to Chuck Hyak that the lovers had not lost more than one or two *canim tikegh*.

Dave watched and waited anxiously. No *canim tikegh* had come, though it was past the second hour of the flood. Presently great spinning maelstroms would begin to form in the channel—whirlpools that would suck down any small craft, that would gulp a fir log five feet thick, munch it and mumble it, spew it out a hundred feet below, and pop its tremendous weight clear of the water as a boy pops a cherry stone from between his lips.

Still no love ship! Dave was worried. The feeling of anxiety was new to him. With a strong white man's contempt for the Indian, he had laughed when Myena told him that the Indians declared her a trespasser on Memaloost Island, where their graveyard had been for ages. Why, Myena's father had taken Memaloost Island as a government claim, the island and a hundred acres of mainland. All her father's land belonged to Myena—there was no doubt of that.



But no love ship had come, and something must have happened. Myena had written that Talapus George, the half-breed, had grown insolent, and that she had forbidden him the island, even if he was the half white son of old Kogo Mary, whom she loved, who had cared for her since she had been a little girl.

Dave, pacing the bank, looking out over the channel for signs of a belated love ship, muttered to himself. A score of times he had urged Myena to abandon her island and go with him to Sitka, where licenses were to be bought and preachers to be hired. Always she had refused. With affectionate obduracy she had insisted that there was a great mystery for her to solve before she could consent to become Mrs. Dave Rowley; but what the mystery was she would never say.

Momentarily the threatening, ugly mood of Chuck Hyak increased. The twisting vortices, the spinning funnels, were dipping deeper and deeper into the water and constantly widening their foaming brims. Unless the love ship came soon—very soon—a man would be a fool that ventured out to salvage one.

Striking his great hands together nervously, Dave walked up and down the shore. Every leaf, every twig, every bit of seaweed dancing along upon the gaining current he scanned with searching eyes. Futile threats made by the Indians against Myena, which had excited only his derisive laughter, now became monstrous, terrible realities.

His Myena, the little singer! In his tortured fancy he saw her fine brown eyes widen with fear. A booming oath escaped his lips as he allowed himself to picture the filthy hands of Talapus George reaching to grasp her, the half-breed's long arms wrapped about her in a gross embrace. Myena had said only that Talapus had grown insolent. What a fool Dave had been not to have understood her more clearly.

Thus, as he hurried back and forth along the bank, he permitted tardy comprehension to accuse him. With his hands cupped to shade his eyes, he watched a chip dancing along. Half a dozen logs followed, grinding one another, slipping down the incline of a maelstrom, gyrating for an instant, and then gone, to come popping forth a distance below, naked of their bark.

There! A cedar shake, bright and new!

Gone were all thoughts of the terrible, imminent dangers dancing merrily on the sudsy brims of the water funnels. Dave flung off the chain painter that held his tugging dory to a tree root, and took up the oars. With fast, powerful strokes he held the dory against the current that piled green water on the bow.

Nearer swept the love ship, and still nearer. He reached and grasped it, drew it in, and rowed frantically away from the vortex toward which the flood had borne him.

Flinging the chain painter about the tree root, Dave leaped ashore, the *canim tikegh* under his arm. With a slash of his knife he freed the clam shell from the board. A pry with the point of the blade sprung open the shell. There, tightly folded, was a bulky letter—two letters, in fact—a brief introductory one and a second consisting of several closely written pages.

## II

DAVE gave a hurried glance at the note, turned his gaze upon the cedar shake. Upon its borders, in the soft wood, were marks of a dog's teeth. This was the note:

DEAREST DAVE:

If Kamooks fails me, you will never see this note. You who love me gave Kamooks to me. He loves me, too, faithful fellow! I feel that he will not fail me. Until I see you again, dear Dave, much love.

Yours as ever,  
MYENA.

Tears welled up in Dave's gray eyes. Kamooks, the gallant, loyal little dog that he had given to Myena, had not failed her. The marks of his teeth—his signature—showed upon the substance of the little love ship. He flirited the tears from his eyes and glanced out over the surfate of Chuck Hyak, which was growing wilder every minute. No way, no possible way for him to get to Memaloost. Nothing weaker than a powerful tug could make headway against those raging waters. No way, until hours later, when the tide slackened, for him to go to Myena's aid.

With shaking hand, Dave unfolded the second letter:

Yesterday Kogo Mary warned me to leave Memaloost Island, at least until after the celebration of the *lakit sitkum*, when the Indians mourn for one of their departed chiefs. I refused. Memaloost Island is my home.

All day I heard the war drums thud and listened to the wailing of the dancing mourners. Again Kogo Mary urged me to leave. Again I re-

fused. At last Mary pressed her chin to my forehead—the Indian farewell—got into her canoe, paddled across the channel, and joined the celebration.

With Kogo Mary gone, I began to feel a bit nervous. Kamooks acted strangely. Every hair upon his back stood straight up, and he whined and scratched at the door continuously. Finally he made such a terrific fuss that I determined to see what was the matter. I strapped on dad's old six-shooter, shoved Kamooks back into the room when he tried to follow me, and closed the door. He nearly tore the house down, good old Kamooks!

The first thing I discovered was a canoe on my beach that had no business to be there—Talapus George's. Sheltered by the boulders that lie along the ridge back of the cabin, I crept to the high flat that commands the whole of the island and the mainland across the channel. I discovered a figure sneaking along, dodging in and out among the trees. It was Talapus George. I knew him by the red and green Mackinaw coat that he was wearing.

When I saw that Talapus was making his way toward the Indian graveyard, I followed. Hiding myself in a clump of hardback bush at the edge of the cemetery, I looked on. Talapus had come to a stop beside the burial canoe of old Paseisei, the great *tyee*. The half-breed looked back furtively over his shoulder. Then he lifted one of the thick cedar planks that cover the burial canoe, ran his arm down inside, and began to feel about. He lifted out two skin sacks of something that appeared to be heavy, and then two more sacks. He carefully replaced the plank over the canoe, gathered up the four sacks, and ran out of the graveyard like a deer. He plunged recklessly down the slope, sped along the beach, flung the four sacks into his canoe, and paddled away frantically.

The mystery was solved for me, Dave. I have never told you the secret. I will tell it now. My father took up Memaloost Island and a hundred and twenty acres of mainland as a government claim, and built the cabin in which I live. The Indians tried to drive him away, as Memaloost, a burying ground, was *musatchie*, a sacred place; but dad was not to be driven off. He defied the Indians and always went armed. When Tel Cohasset, the champion Indian wrestler, challenged him at a potlatch, dad threw Cohasset so hard that they had to pack him into Sitka in a canoe to have his ribs fixed up.

Dad, who had mined a lot, knew gold signs when he saw them. He began to pan the sands on the little creek that runs through our mainland acres. He found gold, a lot of gold. With a rifle on the bank and the big old six-shooter dangling at his hip, he panned away, fetching in every night from a teaspoonful to a double handful of gold dust and small nuggets.

The Indians grew uglier and uglier. Notice after notice of eviction was served on him, but he laughed in their faces. Finally they resolved to resort to violence, and a war party crept upon him where he was panning gold in the creek. In the fight that followed my father was killed, and old Paseisei, the *tyee*, chief of the tribe, was killed also.

I was five years old when poor dad was killed. Paseisei, because he was the *hyas tyee*, or highest chief, they buried with great ceremony in his war

canoe, in the midst of the grave boxes on Memaloost. Kogo Mary came to take care of me. She was always good to me, and I love her.

Father had accumulated fourteen deerskin sacks full of gold dust and nuggets, which he kept in the cupboard. The Indians came and took the sacks away, saying that the gold belonged to the spirit of Paseisei. Kogo Mary told me all this when I was about ten years old. Ever since I have hunted the island and the mainland, everywhere seeking my father's gold, for Mary told me that under no circumstance would an Indian spend, or take for his personal use, *musatchie* gold; but I never was able to locate it. Talapus George showed me to-day where the gold has been hidden all these years—in the burial canoe of old Paseisei, a place I would never think of searching, because I do respect the natives' feeling for the inviolability of their dead.

But the gold is mine. Talapus George did not hesitate to invade the sanctity of a grave.

As Talapus paddled away, I ran to the burial canoe, lifted aside one of the covering planks, and lifted out the sacks that he had left—ten of them. Running as fast as I could, carrying only two sacks at a time, for they are heavy, I got the ten sacks into the cabin, where I hid them in the cupboard behind some dishes and tin cans.

I must hurry with this letter. The Indians have danced and chanted themselves into a frenzy. I should have said right in the beginning that I am a prisoner here in the cabin, with only faithful little Kamooks to comfort me. He just licked my hand, looked up at me, and whined. Then he ran to the door, sniffed, and showed every tooth in his head. Four Indians are patrolling around and around the cabin to make certain that I do not escape.

To go back—I had no more than placed the ten sacks of gold dust in the cupboard when some one came thundering at the door. It was burst in, and an Indian rushed at me, his face covered with one of their hideous death masks. I banged away with the six-shooter, but missed. The next instant the Indian had me by the throat, and Kamooks had him by the back of the neck.

Other Indians, all masked, poured in. They crushed me down. One gave Kamooks a brutal thrust with a seal spear, and another struck him with the haft of one. Two Indians held me, while the others searched the house, found the bags of gold dust, and carried them away. I fought my captors with all my might, screaming at them that Talapus George had first violated the *tyee's* grave and had taken some of the gold.

One of the Indians held up a hairpin that had been found beside the rifled burial canoe. I must have dropped it, and it was the clew that led the Indians to my cabin. When I again declared that Talapus George had taken some of the gold, the natives held a conference. Of course I understand the language. This ceremony of dancing and singing is what they call the *lakit sitkum*, observed every sixteen years. It is then that the remains of a great *tyee*, or chief, are set adrift on the flood tide, in a war canoe, to be borne to Indian glory by the racing current of Chuck Hyak. To propitiate the spirit of the exalted dead, his weapons, his dancing masks, all his treasure, and, in the olden times, one or more living human captives were placed in the war canoe to perish with the *tyee*.

The talk among the masked Indians wasn't very comforting. Over and again they declared that in the flood tide I was to die, and Talapus George was to die. I can scarcely believe that they would dare. If I had not smelled the fumes of that miserable potato whisky on the breath of my captors, I would laugh at my fears; but hootch, plus the frenzy of the *lakit sitkum*—

I want you, Dave. If you get this letter, come, as fast as you can. I am having plenty of time to write. These Indian celebrations are long-drawn-out affairs. My guards constantly patrol about the cabin. When I opened the door to look out, one hurled a seal spear to frighten me, burying its head in the door jamb.

I have just bathed the wounds of poor, faithful Kamooks, covering his cuts with some of the sticking plaster from the first aid kit that you fetched for me from Sitka. He seems grateful. He whimpers and thrusts his hot nose into my hand. I poured some canned milk into a saucer for him, but he would not drink. Poor little chap, he is frightfully lame and stiff. Just the same, because he loves me, I know that he is not going to fail me.

You know, Dave, months ago I taught Kamooks to swim out when I saw one of your love ships coming and bring it in. He almost taught himself to launch them when I was sending one to you. One day, when I was sending you a message, Kamooks took the cedar shake in his mouth and waded into the water, shoulder high. I encouraged him, and he swam out, released the *canim tikegh*, and swam back. Ever since I have allowed him to send out the little ships. This time he will not fail me. I am going to open a rear window very quietly and give Kamooks this message. I will tell him to launch it for me. I risk opening the door again, to attract the attention of my guards and give Kamooks a chance to get down to the water.

I am going to try it now, right away. Good-by, Dave, until I see you. Come as quickly as you can. I am afraid!

Lovingly yours,

MYENA.

His eyes staring at the horrors that his imagination conjured up for him, Dave clutched the letter in his hand. He ran to the rocky border of Chuck Hyak and stared out over its surface, where foam-capped spirals of water were dancing, spinning madly like so many maleficent sprites. Then he jumped down the bank and started to undo the chain painter of his dory.

Abruptly he ceased. He might as well will to fly to the moon as to attempt to row against that mighty current. It was impossible!

### III

DAVE climbed back up the bank and ran up and down like one bereft, forcing himself to a stop occasionally to study the channel. Perhaps Myena would launch a second love ship fraught with the glad tidings that she had been frightened without

cause, that the Indians had concluded their religious orgy and gone peacefully home.

No love ship hove in sight. Dave strained his eyes against the waste until they ached. He held his tortured head in his hands, rocked it back and forth, and called her name. He wept and talked to himself.

Again he walked to the spot where his boat lay tugging at the chain that held it. From regarding the boat hopelessly, he turned miserable eyes up the channel in the direction of Memaloost.

There, away in the offing, was a speck—something. It took on size, dimensions, form, as it swept toward him. It was the great high-prowed war canoe, the moving mausoleum freighted with the bones of old Paseisei. Lying in the bottom of the craft—a sizable boat, capable of carrying from fifteen to twenty men—would be the sacks of propitiatory gold, the white man's wealth that would magnify Paseisei's celestial station.

The twisting war canoe was setting in toward the opposite shore. By rowing straight across in a dory, a strong man might reach it, ram the bow of his boat against the rail of the war canoe, and shunt it off into the back eddy close to the bank.

As the big canoe sped nearer, twisting and turning, Dave caught sight of something drifting in its lee—a second canoe, a tiny one. A sharp, appealing sound struck upon his ear. It was the bark of a dog, nervous, high-pitched.

Like a madman Dave tore free the chain painter, shoved the dory free, and leaped in. He looked back over his shoulder as he rowed with tremendous strokes out into that surge of boiling whirlpool. It was Kamooks, the faithful! Dave could discern the patches of white plaster that covered the little fellow's honorable wounds. The dog was standing with his forepaws resting upon the gunwale of Myena's tiny cedar dugout.

Again, with muzzle lifted to the sky, Kamooks uttered his wailing death cry. He ran the brief length of the canoe, set his forepaws upon the stern, and gave forth his almost human note. Faithful, loving Kamooks!

Sobbing as he rowed with titan strength, muttering strange oaths, Dave rowed on. Over his shoulder he called:

"Coming, Kamooks! Coming, old man!"

A joyous yelp answered him. Straight past the bow of the great war canoe, with its freight of gold, Dave rowed on.

"Coming, Kamooks! Coming!"

With a dozen more strokes Dave set the prow of his dory against the rail of the canoe.

"Jump, Kamooks! Come on! Come on, little dog!" Dave coaxed, rowing strongly, holding the nose of his boat against the side of the tiny canoe, as he endeavored to push the little craft toward safer water.

Dave pleaded and shouted, but Kamooks only whimpered and ran back and forth in the canoe. Nearer swept all three of the boats—the dory, the war canoe, and the tiny dugout—toward a great dancing vortex that would surely suck them down.

"Kamooks! Please, old man!"

Kamooks, the faithful, would not leave his post. Appealingly he looked at Dave, howled, whimpered, and cringed; but he remained in the little canoe.

Heaving upon one oar, back paddling with the other, Dave set the dory against the dugout, rail to rail. He reached to grasp Kamooks and draw him in; but the dog snarled a warning and set his paws upon something that lay in the bottom of the canoe. It was Myena, bound about and about with deerhide thongs, and with a patch of doeskin tied tightly about her face.

Almost had the dory and the two canoes drifted to the edge of a menacing whirlpool. Lightning fast worked Dave's mind. In the bottom of Myena's canoe lay two paddles. The Indians launch no death canoe without paddles, the belief being that in the spirit world they will be required. The canoe, feather light, under command of a strong, skilled hand, would have three chances to the lumbering dory's one.

In a leap Dave was into the dugout and had grasped a paddle. The war canoe, no more than thirty feet away, poised for an instant upon the brink of the maelstrom. The heavy boat quivered, up-ended slowly, slipped down the sirupy-smoothness of the watery funnel, and ground itself down into the sucking maw.

As the jaws of the sea monster closed upon the war canoe, several deerskin sacks were flung into the water, to sink instantly. Not so soon sank the mummied body of old Paseisei, swathed in wrappings of seal hide and gaudy blanket, nor another

squat, powerful figure heavily wrapped, with its face covered with a doeskin gag. For an instant the living and the dead spun about in a dance of death; then they went down in the watery chaos.

Dave lifted the light canoe away from that reaching vortex with a deep dip of the paddle. Skirting the border of a second maelstrom, he laid a course between the gaping holes and paddled as never had he paddled before. The sweat rolled down his face and neck, and dripped from his great hands, which were white with their grip upon the paddle.

An errant tide rip gave the canoe a sheer, almost flinging it into a funnel that formed suddenly to Dave's left. Madly he clawed away from danger and again took up his course. Again and again he was swept back, veering violently to one side or the other.

The breath wheezed from his tortured lungs like pent steam. Momentarily he went blind. Everything turned dark, so heavily did his pumping heart charge his eyes with blood. The tendons of his wrists, the muscles of his arms and shoulders, stood out like the cordage of a straining ship's winch.

Gaining a few inches, and then losing them, he still struggled on. With the last vestige of his strength he shot the canoe across the gaping mouth of a lesser vortex and won the comparative smoothness of the inshore water. More he gained, the impulse of the back eddy. Weakly he paddled on until he came to the projecting root where he was wont to tie his dory. Almost he swamped the canoe as he leaned over, seized the root, and held the craft against the bank while he regained breath and strength.

As his vision cleared, he saw Kamooks licking Myena's bound hands. Drawing the canoe in a little farther, Dave held to the root with one hand and lifted the helpless girl upon the bank with the other. Kamooks, capering like a very lunatic, sprang after her and went tearing up and down the bank. His little heart bursting with joy, the dog completed a dizzy circle and sprang upon Dave as if he would devour him for pure ecstasy.

Myena turned her head as Dave fumbled her bonds loose. She looked up, her face pale, but her brown eyes glorified.

"Did you get the love ship, Dave?" she asked.



"Yes—with Kamooks's tooth marks upon the cedar shake."

"The little darling!" she said gently. "When those drunken Indians laid me in the canoe, all bound, to follow Paseisei and Talapus George to a watery grave, I heard a whimper. Just as an Indian pushed my death craft free, I felt a thud, and the next instant a warm tongue was licking my hands. Kamooks had come to die with me."

Tears streamed down Dave's face as he took the little dog's head between his big hands.

"Just for that, Kamooks," he said brokenly, "you're going to have a hunk of the very best meat there is!"

#### IV

UPON the ebb of the tide Myena, Dave, and Kamooks drifted and paddled back to Memaloost. Old Kogo Mary, with her blanket drawn up over her head in the mourning sign, sat before the stove in Myena's cabin. The old *klootchman* flung off the blanket as the door opened. Stolidly she regarded Myena and Dave. If she felt surprise, or gratitude, or joy that the white girl was still alive, none of them did she exhibit.

The Indian woman lifted a hand and pointed to the cupboard.

"There you find it," she said. "There you find the *pil chickamin* that make trou-

ble for many. Long time ago I know trouble comes," she continued. "I take gold out of the sacks in Paseisei's grave canoe. I put in sand instead, and hide the real *pil chickamin*. Just now I fetch it here. I say I will wait here two tides. If Myena does not come, I burn down the cabin and go away from here. Myena comes. Her lover is a *skookum* man, and brave. She is here. The gold is here. It is good. *Klahowa tikegh tillicums!*"

Kogo Mary arose. Her "*Klahowa tikegh tillicums*" meant "Farewell, dear friends."

Myena had run to the cupboard and opened one of the sacks. Into her palm she poured a gleaming cascade of gold dust and nuggets. The wealth was there, all of it, for which her father had given his life.

"I go away from here," said Kogo Mary, pausing an instant in the doorway. "Because I am mother of Talapus, who was wicked, Indians all drunk burn down my house. No place I got now to live. I go away. *Klahowa!*"

Myena gave Dave a meaning look.

"No, Mary, you are not going away. Dave and I are going away. This house, this island, are yours, so long as you live. These, too, are yours. They will keep you in comfort for the remainder of your life."

Into the withered claws of old Kogo Mary Myena delivered two of the weighty sacks of precious gold dust.

#### INNOMINATE

If I should weary of thee, love?

That could not be!

As well the wind might weary of

The untamed sea.

Are not thine eyes as deep as hers,

Thy heart as high?

Thine arms are all my universe,

My earth, my sky.

If I should weary of thee, sweet?

Chide not in play!

As well the sun might fail to greet

Returning day.

Does not thy soul blaze with a flame

As white, as strong?

For thee I cannot find a name,

Save only song.

F. L. Montgomery

# Don Quicksoty and the Quartermaster

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN COXSWAIN TRIMBLE'S DAY OF GLORY,  
BUT FATE PLAYED A SHOCKINGLY MEAN TRICK ON  
THAT AMBITIOUS YOUNG PETTY OFFICER

By Elliot C. Bergen

"**F**ALL in!" The command rang sharply across the parade ground, breaking up idling groups of white-uniformed sailors, and drawing them toward the center, as if the smallish figure of the chief petty officer standing there were a magnet.

"Well, don't you guys know where you belong? Fall in! That don't mean fall in a trance! Right dress! Ease off there, you end squads, an' leave the rest of 'em room to untangle their funny bones!"

The company at length got itself lined up in a wavy front that would have meant apoplexy to any army sergeant; but these things didn't give the quartermaster apoplexy. They gave him humorous inspiration.

"Log me for a wall-eyed googoo," he declaimed, "if this company ain't the trickiest troupe of acrobats I ever seen! If that's the best you can do with your hands an' feet, how you gonna handle your guns? Half the outfit 'll be clubbed to death, an' the other half 'll be in the brig for manslaughter!"

He paused for a fresh breath. The company stood fast, meekly waiting.

"Where do you birds get your notions about a straight line? Look at your feet! Haul in some o' them stummicks! Jack up your chins before you start snorin'! All right, now, that's a little better. Comp'ny, 'ten-shun!"

At this point the monologue seemed about to cease and the drill to be resumed. An untoward incident, however, provided the quartermaster with material for further eloquence.

"Cox'n Trimble, front an' center!"

The words were rapped out with ominous gusto. A tall youth with crossed anchors and one blue chevron on his sleeve marched briskly around from the rear and stood at attention before the company commander.

"She was a swell-lookin' dame, Trimble," was the latter's tart comment, "but that don't pin any medals on your chest. If there's gonna be any hand wavin' to wanderin' women, I'll do the wavin', see? Your job here is file closer, an' you got as much to learn as the next man, an' maybe more. Get back where you belong, now, an' watch your step. Left—face! For'ard—march!"

It was a common spectacle in the summer of 1917—a body of newly enlisted gobs, gathered from office and factory and schoolroom, slowly and awkwardly mastering the first steps for fumbling feet as set forth in the "Bluejackets' Manual" and other standard works compiled for the benefit of the aspiring sailor. Of course, it couldn't be learned solely out of a book. Hence the C. P. O.'s with hashmarks and a sturdy gift of expression. Hence the quartermaster of the current humble yarn—a leathery product of four hitches in the regular outfit, a veteran with the marrow of battleship discipline in his bones.

Leave him with his troubles for a minute and have a look at Coxswain Don Trimble, late recipient of a public bawling out.

He's freshly picked from civilian life, as are the others. He's been at the Rondyvoo something less than a week, and is just

about on speaking terms with the thirteen buttons of his liberty pants. He got his rating on enlistment because he had sailed a boat in summer vacations; but he's an upstanding lad and shakes a military foot alongside the marching column. He'll make a sailor, once he settles down to it.

Back in the armory, after two hours of drilling, the company took it easy till dinner. After listening to an almost uninterrupted flow of talk from one man, this was a fine opportunity to do a little talking themselves; and there are always plenty of things to talk about when a lot of men from varied walks of life get together in a common undertaking.

The quartermaster, being out of earshot, dominated their discussions. He was something new to most of them. He might provoke admiration on one hand and dislike on the other, but he stirred the interest of all.

"Ding bust the little runt—he sure can throw the hooks into yuh!"

This tribute, offered by Jim Beckley, got unquestioned recognition, however grudging some of it might be.

"Hooks, nothin'," said Pinky Flynn scornfully. "He's jest got a long line without nothin' on it."

"Yeah? I didn't see you givin' him no arguments. You was too busy steppin' on your own toes. The way you was executin' them pivots pretty near give me the hysterics. Do it that way to-morrow, will you, buddy? There was a couple o' times this mornin' when I wasn't lookin'."

"I know!" came the quick retort. "That must 'a' been when you started climbin' up my back. I was figurin' you thought 'halt' meant to wipe your feet on the guy in front o' you."

"G'wan! You wasn't frettin' about my feet. All the figurin' you done was how to keep them number elevens o' yours out o' each other's way. The skipper had his eye on you. I thought he'd bust right out laughin'."

"Well," observed Pinky, veering off easily on another tack, "what's the idea of all the marchin', anyway? This ain't the army, an' that guy don't know how to learn us this here parade stuff. Why don't they ship us out? That's what we signed up for. I betcha—"

"Look at who's here!" broke in Charlie Tabb. "The kid 'imself! Don Quicksoty, front an' center!"

That was the way Coxswain Trimble got his nickname. He may not have resembled Cervantes's hero in either looks or manner, and Charlie may never have heard of the late Cervantes; but the coxswain had a romantic air about him, and perhaps the offhand appellation wasn't so far amiss.

"Don Quicksoty is good!" guffawed Pinky.

The young sailor referred to grinned acknowledgment and sat down on a nearby cot.

"The little feller was plumb peevish this mornin'," he observed. "Can't a guy appreciate female beauty without gettin' hauled up on the carpet?"

Charlie eyed him sadly.

"Female beauty ain't for you, son. You're in the navy now. You gotta lay off the soft stuff an' go to war. Did you think there was any glory in this business? Forget it! Wait till you stand a mid watch down on the dock. That was me last night—four hours hoofin' it all the way to nowhere an' back again, with one of them Springfield cannons makin' ruts in my collar bone. There's one good thing about it, I says to myself—the war 'll be that much closer to over by the time I turn in."

"It must have been awful," said the coxswain thoughtfully. "I'm glad it wasn't me. Maybe it would have helped if you'd known I was over at the beach with a couple of girls in tow. I was dancin' with 'em pretty nearly all night. I remember tellin' them about some of my buddies doin' sentry duty right at the same time we was enjoyin' ourselves. They got a good laugh out of it."

Charlie called him a skirt-chasing something or other and lapsed into sorrowful reflection. Pinky, glancing over the coxswain's shoulder, was about to mention the approach of the quartermaster, when Jim Beckley interrupted him. Jim had fixed upon young Trimble a gaze of frank envy, which presently found expression.

"You're pretty dog-gone smart with the women, ain't you, Trimble? Was this here Quicksoty guy a lady's man?"

"In his time," was the grave reply, "he knocked 'em dead; but he was an old-timer. Nowadays you've gotta handle 'em different. I'll take you along some time an' show you."

"Yeah—when the skipper ain't around," suggested Jim significantly.

"Oh, him!" The coxswain sniffed loftily. "Why, no girl would look at him. He'll do the wavin', will he? I'd like to see that pie-face get a tumble out of any jane I'm goin' with!"

This utterance was received with such unnatural sobriety that the speaker knew at once something must be wrong. He turned to find the quartermaster glaring down at him.

It was not a comfortable moment. Silence hung ominously over the group. The quartermaster cleared his throat, and when he spoke his voice had a fine cutting edge.

"Maybe if I give you enough rope, Trimble, you'll hang yourself. Maybe the next time I want an opinion about my face, I'll come an' ask you for it. As to the question o' women, what I said out there still goes. All right, you fellers, there's mess call. Line up, an' don't be all day doin' it!"

## II

A FEW days later Coxswain Trimble, *alias* Don Quicksot, leaving the mess table at a little past noon, started for the rear door of the armory. At this rear door a wagon might be seen, containing ice cream, cakes, and other nonessential edibles. It was a custom of the enlisted men to regale themselves therefrom—a custom uncomplimentary to the cuisine of the United States Navy, but one that was much in vogue, nevertheless.

The coxswain had his palate sweetly set for an ice cream sandwich. A harsh voice sounded in his ear, and he turned impatiently. The quartermaster, with what looked like a malicious gleam in his eye, beckoned to young Trimble.

"Like to get a little fresh air?" said the quartermaster.

"I was just goin' out for some," the coxswain replied.

"Not there! Besides, that wagon junk will put your digestion on the rocks. I've got a job for you, Don Quicksot."

"What?"

"Report to Mr. Bonnell," the quartermaster ordered, and strolled away.

Coxswain Trimble turned a disgruntled back on his ice cream sandwich and hurried to the desk, over which the mild visage of Ensign Bonnell, the officer of the day, regarded him inquiringly.

"My company commander told me to report to you, sir," said the coxswain.

"Oh, yes!" Mr. Bonnell cast a sidelong glance at our hero's chevron, and reached for a package. "Take this to my tailor," he said, "and tell him the buttonholes need mending and one of the beackets on the shoulder is loose. Also, he has a suit of blues to be cleaned and pressed, which I believe is ready. You can bring that back. Be careful not to wrinkle it. Here's the address."

There was red in the coxswain's eye as he stepped forth upon his errand. There were red spots in the bright afternoon sun that shed luster over his gleaming person. He saw through a glass redly, and the whole landscape was tinged with the crimson of his wrath.

He, a petty officer in the United States Navy, doing duty as a messenger boy! He, a volunteer in the service of his country, running up the street with an ensign's wardrobe! He had enlisted to go to war, and they were sending him to the tailor's. So this was the price of patriotism! He'd get the quartermaster for it, if it took a lifetime!

On the way to his destination he plotted vengeance and thought of many names wherewith to label his chief petty enemy. Even thus occupied, however, his rage gradually cooled. The day was pleasant, and freedom from the afternoon's routine was not to be sniffed at. By the time he reached the tailor shop, which was only a few blocks from the Rondyvoo, he had almost forgotten the humiliating nature of his mission.

He entered the place jauntily. The tailor unwrapped the package and spread the contents upon the table. The blues, he said, would be ready right away; he was just pressing the trousers. The coxswain nodded and strolled to the doorway, whistling. A lovely day, he thought; a lovely world, too, barring quartermasters and such.

A full-length mirror presently attracted him. He found himself surveying his trim reflection approvingly, in a detached, dreamy sort of way. He possessed a certain swank that could not be denied. Even to a gob outfit he lent dignity and grace. What elegance might he achieve, then, in the garb of rank? His eye wandered to the uniform on the table.

From the back room the tailor hustled out with Mr. Bonnell's blues. The coxswain stepped over and picked up the white blouse from the table.



"How would I look in this?" said he, speculatively.

"Pretty fine, I should think," said the tailor, grinning.

"Pretty ding-dang snooty, I should say," agreed the coxswain.

"Try 'em on," suggested the tailor, indicating a curtain in the corner.

The coxswain hesitated a moment, then gathered up the uniform and disappeared. In no time at all he stepped forth, unbelievably resplendent. He stepped majestically across the room and gazed into the mirror at his transformed image, standing in a blaze of glory. He was overwhelmed. Emotion clogged his throat, but he fought it down manfully.

"Me and the O. D. are about the same build," he observed, with a careless gesture.

The tailor, who was relishing the performance, brought out shoulder straps and fastened them on.

"Wonder how I'd look in a cap!" mused the boy, and the tailor found one in the hack room that fitted not so badly.

"There, now—pretty fine, like I said. You are—what you call it?—shipshape, eh?"

"Shipshape is right," exulted the coxswain, with his eyes glued to the mirror. "I could take a battle wagon through Hell Gate an' stand it on its hind legs! Man, I wish I had that quartermaster here! I'd make him salute me till he had the cramps."

The tailor, who was a good-natured fellow, laughed appreciatively. He was in the midst of his laugh when a shadow darkened the doorway. The shadow materialized into a man, and the man happened to be a naval officer with two gold stripes on his sleeve.

The newcomer glanced sharply at the tall figure in whites before the mirror, and then at the tailor, as if wondering what might be the joke between them. The coxswain automatically snapped his right hand to his cap. The lieutenant responded, and, turning to the tailor, said brusquely:

"Busy? How long shall I have to wait?"

Before the latter could frame a reply, the coxswain spoke up.

"It's all right, sir," he said. "I'm finished;" and with that he walked hastily out into the street. "Holy smoke!" he murmured. "I wonder if that guy belongs at the Rondyvoo! Hope he don't

spot them clothes of mine! Now I'll have to hang around till he gets out of the way."

Fast walking around the block restored his customary composure. He slackened his pace. The day, as he had remarked before, was a very lovely one. Again he began to glow with the pleasure of feeling himself incased in that beautiful uniform.

In order that none of the exquisite effect might be lost, he crossed over to the sunny side of the street. Two girls standing on the corner stared at him as he approached. He smiled at them kindly, thrusting out his chest a little, and passed on. The satisfaction thus derived was unspeakable.

It whetted his appetite for further conquest. He was heading in the direction of the Rondyvoo, and he became obsessed with a craving to gaze on that grim pile from beneath the peak of an officer's headgear. The chances of discovery seemed slight.

"Here goes!" he muttered, and lengthened his stride.

Caution slowed him up as he drew near. From a safe distance he noted that the only navy people in sight were the men on guard around the building. Then caution forsook him. An opportunity like this would never come again. Sucking in a deep breath, he marched on down the street and crossed to the corner on which stood the armory itself.

The sentry there saw him coming, stiffened in his tracks, and presented arms. The coxswain saluted and paused.

"Haul in your stummick!" he growled, and went on his way abruptly, leaving astonishment in his wake.

On the farther corner stood another sentry. This one duplicated the performance of the first. The coxswain, as before, acknowledged the rifle salute and lingered momentarily.

"Jack up your chin before you start snorin'!" was his gruff admonition.

Then he was gone, marching away jauntily up the street, his arms swirring, his chest bulging, his cap listing twenty degrees over one ear.

He was two blocks distant, hull down on the horizon and making knots under a full head of steam, when two outraged gobs, meeting at the juncture of their respective posts, swung their rifles to the port and exchanged mute questions out of each other's eyes. Several moments passed before either became articulate.

"W-w-what in the Sam Hill? Who the"—interval of sputtering and gulps—"say, who let him loose, anyway?"

"How the blank-blank-blank should I know? 'Haul in your stummick,' he yaps, an' me with a waistline that 'd make Venus de Milo look like a baby blimp!"

### III

On the spacious floor of the armory the quartermaster was barking his usual summons:

"Fall in!"

The company lined up, counted off, and stood at attention. They were smoother at it now. They had more hours of drilling behind them, and they moved with more facility and finesse. The quartermaster looked them over quizzically from end to end.

"Well, now, you're a fine body o' men! You can form a straight comp'ny front—when you got the deck plankin' to guide by. You've got brains an' good looks, an' sometimes you know the difference between left an' right. You're the pride o' this here navy—now ain't you?"

A titter trickled audibly through the ranks. The quartermaster clamped his lean face into grim lines.

"Belay the laughin'! There's nothin' to laugh about when you're goin' to war. If there's gonna be any laughin', I'll be the one that does it, see? Now, men, we're startin' on a little cruise around the town, an' we'll see if you've got savvy enough to keep out o' the way o' the trolley cars. Any man that thinks this is a picnic or a boy scout hike can fall out now an' get set for two weeks' extra duty. You'll get your rifles as you go out. Comp'ny, 'ten-shun! Left by squads! For'ard—march!"

She was a nice little girl, and time hung heavy on her hands. The tall young officer didn't look as if he was in any special hurry, either. He was coming closer. Maybe he was lonely. Gracious, what a handsome man! Oh, he certainly meant to speak to her! He—

She just loved the way he raised his hand stiffly to his cap, instead of taking it off. She loved the way he smiled down at her and said:

"I know you wouldn't mind cheerin' up a homesick seafarer."

They were sauntering along side by side

then, and she told herself that she had been right about his being lonely—never suspecting, of course, that in forty-five minutes by trolley he could be in his mother's arms, or that all his seafaring, thus far, had been confined to Long Island Sound.

"What ship do you belong to?" she said. "Or mustn't I be nosy about things like that?"

"You couldn't be nosy if you tried," he answered gallantly, "an' I'd trust you with all the secrets in the navy; but I'm detached right now. I don't belong to any ship."

"Oh!" She thought that over, and presently asked, looking at his shoulder strap: "What's your position? You know what I mean—your rank?"

"Coxswain," he nearly said, but caught the word in time. "One stripe's for an ensign," he explained.

The word apparently inspired no awe. She must have counted on a commodore, at least. The white uniform, however, seemed to make up for any deficiencies in the name that went with it. She showed an interest in it that amounted almost to concern—not in the blouse so much as in the trousers. The trousers, somehow, fascinated her.

And well they might. Even to the casual observer they would have appeared to lack stability, and to show an annoying tendency to gather in folds about the ensign's ankles. At intervals a guarded hoisting movement, executed with the hand on his free side, restored the alignment—a sea-going gesture, to be sure, but one scarcely becoming an officer and a gentleman under circumstances like these.

A cap and shoulder straps—these the jolly tailor had furnished to eke out the coxswain's transient glory; but no belt. Neither of them had thought of it.

"Me and the O. D. are about the same build," the coxswain had said.

The O. D., it seemed, was slight of girth; and trousers that fit will stay neatly moored without persuasion—that is, if the buttons thereof are all on duty. If, however, the top button is insecurely made fast, gradually works loose, and then goes abruptly A. W. O. L., there is quite another story to tell.

"Let's sit down," suggested the ensign.

"Let's," agreed the girl, her voice eloquent with sympathy.

They were in one of those pretty urban parks, with gravel walks and shrubbery and tall trees and benches—especially benches. The rest didn't matter. Nothing mattered but the desperate need of a place to sit.

"You're not sick, are you?" the girl asked gently.

He shook his head and grinned. Temporarily the day was saved, he reflected, but he couldn't anchor here forever. The afternoon was getting on. Pants or no pants, he would have to get back to the tailor shop and then to the Rondyvoo. Fifteen minutes more he would give himself, and that would be all.

"It's tough," he was saying to his attentive companion, who sat gazing dreamily across the park, "that us men in the service don't get more time to enjoy life. Here I've just found you, an'—an' right away I gotta leave you!"

"Well, there's lots more," was the reply. "Lots more of me, I mean. I've heard a sailor has a girl in every port."

"Listen, little girl! In my outfit they call me Don Quicksoty. They call me that because I'm supposed to be so handy with the ladies. I'm not denyin' I like 'em; but d'you know what? You got 'em all stopped—that's straight!"

"I bet," said the girl, idly plucking at a fold in the sleeve of his blouse, "you know that speech by heart."

"Aw, come on!" he protested. "Say somethin' pretty to make a guy feel good! Tell me somethin' I can remember on a dark night out in the middle of the ocean!"

"All right, Don Quicksoty!"

She paused thoughtfully, her eyes wandering away toward a gate at the far corner of the park. Then she said it—not, perhaps, the sort of thing she had meant to say, but it served. It was something he would remember on many a dark night, whether in the middle of the ocean or elsewhere.

"Oh, look—look! There's some sailors marching, with guns and everything! They're coming this way—oh, aren't they just grand? And see that little man in the blue suit shouting at them! He's the captain, isn't he?"

#### IV

STIMULATED by the responsibilities hanging upon its first public appearance, and enjoying its freedom from the dusty

drill ground, the company outdid itself that sunny afternoon. Even the rifles were handled with a decent respect to the small arms manual. There were no mishaps in the sometimes hazardous transition from right shoulder to slope, or *vice versa*—for which all hands felt duly grateful, and none more so than the quartermaster.

Secretly the quartermaster was pleased. Outwardly he regarded the whole excursion as a dismal flop.

"If you'd glue your peepers on the collar o' the man in front, 'stead o' gawkin' all around the scenery, you'd get along! This ain't riot formation—it's column o' squads. Close up, there! Watch 'em, you file closers! Column right oblique!"

They came to the park, marched through the gate, and swung in good order along the gravel path. The quartermaster's roving eye took on a sudden gleam of interest.

"Squads—left! Comp'ny—halt!"

Scuffing of sixty pairs of feet, and the thud of sixty Springfield butts coming to earth.

"Parade—rest!"

Subdued conversation broke out in the rear rank.

"Look at what's yonder on that there bench!"

"Uh-huh! Pretty soft!"

"Must be one of them swivel chair navigators. I wonder does he think the war's over!"

"That's a mighty smooth baby he's croonin' to."

"G'wan! You can't pick 'em at this range. Like to bet she's a fright. Maybe—"

"Pipe down in the ranks!" snapped the quartermaster. "How many times do I have to tell you men that parade rest ain't the signal for a chin waggin' contest? Comp'ny, 'ten-shun! Fix—bayonets! Port—arms! Right shoulder—arms! Keep them spikes up in the air where they belong, now! Squads right! For'ard—"

"I'm so sorry you don't feel well!" The girl was looking up at him, concern showing in her eyes.

"I'm feelin' all right," he insisted, in a dry voice that contradicted his denial.

"But your color's not good," she said. "It's—"

"It's what?" he demanded, a little resentfully.

"Kind of green," she admitted, reluctant to hurt his feelings.

"Not yellow, though!" the coxswain retorted, peering out defiantly at the moving column from beneath the lowered peak of his cap.

The company came on at a rapid pace, following the curving path around the border of the park. Leaning forward, the girl watched admiringly, tapping a small foot in time to the rhythm of the stride.

"Left! Left! Left, right! Pick it up, men! Shake a toe!"

Closer and closer they swept—tramp, tramp, tramp on the hard gravel—a measured swing of tan canvas legs—a fine array of slanted bayonets gleaming in the sunlight.

"I love this," murmured the girl. "They'll pass real close to us, won't they? I'm so glad you're with me! The captain is looking right at us. They're all looking, too."

The head of the column swung abreast of them.

"Port—arms!" rang the sharp command. "Eyes—right!"

Hand to cap, the quartermaster stared fixedly at the occupants of the bench. The tall young man in whites unfolded himself stiffly, stood up straight, and answered the salute. Sixty pairs of curious eyes, turned to the right, were full upon him. But for the waywardness of luck, it might have been his crowded moment of imperishable glory, which no subsequent misfortune could ever dim.

He answered the salute, and the very jerk of his arm as he did so seemed freighted with retribution and sudden downfall. Something went wrong. His knees were beset with starchy wrinkles that appeared oddly, as if by magic. An unaccountable excess of white cloth descended alarmingly upon his shoe tops. With a swift clawing motion, he grabbed himself desperately about the hips and sat down so abruptly that the bench stood teetering on its hind legs under the impact.

"As you were!" bawled the quartermaster.

Sixty pairs of popping eyes, reluctant to forego so delectable a vision, turned grudgingly front. The column passed along in review.

There was an interval of silence on the bench; then the girl spoke.

"I'm awfully sorry! Really, I—" Her

voice was small and choked and a little unsteady. "What—what happened?"

"I've got a button off," was the hoarse answer.

"Oh!" Another silence. "Look—they're coming back!"

He looked. It was true. The column had faced about and was headed toward them again. He watched its approach dully. It mattered not. Nothing could matter after a man had plumbed the depths.

They were once more abreast of the bench.

"Squads right! Halt!"

The rifle butts thudded to the ground in unison. They were in company front now, facing away from the bench. The quartermaster stepped out into the grassy space and surveyed the ranks.

"Port—arms!" he ordered, and began to pace to and fro restlessly.

"What are they doing?" whispered the girl.

Her companion cleared his throat, which was very dry.

"They take on like that," he explained, "when they're gonna hang somebody."

Silence fell. The quartermaster still paced the greensward. Suddenly he stopped, clicked his heels, and stood facing the company. His voice vibrated crisply on the still air:

"Cox'n Trimble, front an' center!"

The girl looked puzzled. The tall young officer rose cautiously to his feet, thrust one hand beneath his blouse, and held out the other.

"The little squirt is pagin' me," he said coolly. "I got a date with him at the Rondyvoos. G'-by! Glad to have met you."

He touched the peak of his cap gallantly, and with one hand concealed under his blouse, marched jauntily around the end of the line and halted, facing the quartermaster. That worthy gave him one scathing glance and raised his raucous voice in loud command.

"Right shoulder—arms! Squads right! Forward—"

The girl was on her feet, staring at them. The quartermaster raised his arm and waved, then threw a kiss in her direction. She laughed and sent one back.

"Don Quicksoty me eye!" said the quartermaster to the tall young officer who walked silently at his side.



# Tuomi's Pearl

A STORY OF THE SOUTH SEAS, IN WHICH FORCE AND CUNNING AND FRAUD BATTLED FOR A COVETED PRIZE WITH WHAT WAS PERHAPS THE ONLY FITTING RESULT

By R. W. Alexander

JIM GREGG, skipper and owner of the *Sheila*, sat on the port rail and watched Anohe grow from shadow to substance, as it changed from a blue cloud on the horizon to a low green island set in twin girdles of reef and beach. Very softly he whistled a gentle lament, mournful as the cries of the gulls overhead—sweetly sad air that he had whistled long ago on the brown hills of Galway, with the wind sweeping in from the sea and the far distances calling, calling.

He sat with his arms folded, swaying easily to the swing of the ship, an old white hat casting a shadow across his face. His eyes were blue as the sea; his face, throat, and arms were tanned to the brown of mahogany. He was more nearly forty than he liked to think; but the years had left few marks on him, beyond, perhaps, adding a little humor to his mouth and inscribing a wrinkle or two about his eyes. His attire consisted of a sleeveless shirt, a *lava-lava*, and a thin black belt, studded with cartridges, from which a revolver hung.

With the dazzling white beaches of Anohe distant no more than a mile, the schooner halted and lay to, rocking gently. A boat was lowered, with Gregg in the stern, and headed for the break in the reef. Each of the four oarsmen was armed, and rifles rested against the seats; for although Tuomi, chief on Anohe, was friendly, these were the Solomons, and Gregg held that to be careful is better than to be split to the chin with a trade hatchet.

Gregg hopped thigh deep into the water, and the boat backed some distance from the beach. The island seemed deserted, but the skipper knew that his every movement was watched from the green of the jungle.

Wading unconcernedly ashore, he began to admire himself in a tawdry gilt-framed hand mirror, at the same time displaying to advantage several long strings of beads. The knowledge that at any moment a Snider might spout lead and flame at him from the cover of the bush worried him little. These risks were all part of the day's work. Besides, the islanders shoot from the hip, and are poor marksmen.

A lithe brown figure, with rifle under his arm and a hatchet on his hip, came in sight among the palms and advanced into the sunshine. Others followed—among them women with fat babies. Most, with the exception of a red flower behind one ear, were naked and unashamed.

Gregg, more or less a Christian himself, believed that they were all predestined to damnation; but he was ready to trade with them, for all that. The presence of the women relieved such anxiety as he may have felt, and eased the straining readiness of his right arm.

"How come Tuomi fella no along here?" he demanded of the man with the rifle.

Tuomi, a young chief, usually came to the beach to trade—as a measure, Gregg suspected, of guarding his own interests.

The native replied in broken *bêche de mer*. Tuomi, it appeared, was ill, and wished Gregg to visit him at the village.

"Like hell I do!" Gregg said.

With some difficulty, the man explained. Tuomi, in proof of his good faith, had sent his youngest wife as hostage. Gregg glanced at the slender girl and recognized her. Reflecting cynically that he would have decided on the opposite course had the chief's oldest wife been sent, he nodded.

Leading the girl to the edge of the water, he beckoned his men. They brought the

boat in cautiously, two rowing, two holding their rifles. Gregg breathed more easily when Tuomi's youngest wife, looking rather frightened, was a hundred yards from shore.

The man with the rifle led the way along a narrow, winding path into the jungle. Gregg, following, reflected that he was every kind of a darned fool. This belief had become conviction by the time the village was reached. It was just like a hundred others he had seen—a huddle of pandanus-leaf huts dwarfed and shadowed by surrounding trees, the chief's slightly larger than the rest.

At a sign from the native, the skipper stooped and crawled through the low doorway, half expecting to get a knife in the back; but nothing happened, and he stood up unharmed, peering about him in the dim twilight.

"Belly belong um sick," Tuomi said.

He lay far in at the back of the hut, smoking a short clay pipe—a big man with a necklace of sharks' teeth about his throat.

Gregg, squatting down on his heels, said that he would send something to cure Tuomi. He had a few bottles of castor oil aboard, and probably the chief's complaint was overeating; but he had come to talk about trade. He handed over the presents, and Tuomi grunted his approval.

Had Tuomi any copra? Tuomi had not. Gregg was disappointed and puzzled. Tuomi knew well the value of copra, and his young men always kept a supply on hand for any trader who might happen along. There were few skippers reckless enough to visit Anohe, so Gregg was mystified as to the reason for the dearth of copra.

"Bime-by white fella come along trade," Tuomi said.

He counted on his fingers—four days back.

Gregg swore. Tuomi, fumbling in his clay-stiffened hair, produced a wisp of rag. Gregg was uninterested until he saw what the rag held.

It was a pearl—such a pearl as Gregg had never before seen. Perfectly spherical, and almost as large as a marble, it was tinted warmly with rose, as if a flame hid somewhere within its smooth breast. It was a pearl fit for an empress's throat, or to hang from the loveliest ear.

Gregg handled it, Tuomi watching him closely. Little as he knew about pearls, the skipper was sure he held a fortune be-

tween his fingers; but no sign of that showed in his face as he asked Tuomi how he had come by the gem. Tuomi replied that he had traded his supply of copra for it.

Gregg did not believe that. No man in his senses would so lightly value this pearl as to trade it for a load of copra. For some reason, Gregg decided, Tuomi was lying. Probably he had acquired the pearl by cold-blooded murder, and now sought to keep his secret.

Anyhow, that was nothing to Gregg. His concern was to get the pearl from Tuomi for as little as possible.

Dissembling his eagerness, in roundabout ways he hinted that he might trade; but Tuomi, he found, had exaggerated ideas of what the skipper should give. He demanded rifles, knives, hatchets, beads, mirrors, so many yards of calico, and innumerable sticks of tobacco. More, he was obstinate in his demands. It almost seemed that he had some conception of the actual value of the pearl, and had done his best to translate that value into the only terms he knew.

A certain savage shrewdness in the island chief rendered vain all Gregg's persuasions. So obdurate was he that finally the skipper gave up in despair, and made his way back to the beach in an unpleasant humor, with a parting reminder from the chief that he had promised to send something to relieve the state of Tuomi's inner man. Tuomi's youngest wife was to wait for the medicine.

It was the medicine that gave Gregg his idea. Like most skippers of his time, he knew a little about drugs—not much, but enough to prescribe for malaria and a few other of the more prevalent fevers. He mixed a potent sleeping draft for Tuomi, and told the girl that it was to be taken as the sun went down.

## II

THAT night, in the darkness before the moon rose, Gregg went ashore, leaving his boat at the break in the reef and swimming across the lagoon. He knew that this was madness, that the chances were a thousand to one against his living to see the dawn; but he was ready to risk all that for sake of the rose-tinted pearl. Whether he succeeded or not, this meant the end of his amicable relations with Tuomi. He was ready to risk that, too.

"What's the use of a pearl to a damned

nigger, anyway?" he thought, as he rose cautiously from the water.

The beach was dark, the palms a blank wall of shadow. He heard nothing, saw nothing suspicious. With only the soft whisper of disturbed sand to betray his movement, he crossed the beach and slipped into the cover of the trees. There he paused for an instant, to assure himself that his revolver, which he had carried between his teeth, was ready for action. More than probably he would have a use for it before the night was over.

Nothing stirring, he went forward with a caution that a green hand might have thought superfluous; but Gregg had no delusions. Even now, he knew, he might be watched. Lithe figures, silent as shadows, might be abreast of him and on his trail. He wore only a tight, dark loin cloth, and had stained his body with a copal dye; but the precaution would avail him little if once he moved within sight of the hawk-eyed savages.

All paths to the village, he guessed, would be guarded in some way, either by sentinels or by traps of bows set with poisoned arrows; so he avoided the paths, and slipped through the bush with only his sense of direction, and an occasional glimpse of the stars, to guide him. It was a hair-raising journey, and more than an hour had passed before the village came in sight. He covered the last few hundred yards to it with the red glow of a fire as his compass.

Crouched well back from the edge of the clearing, he saw how futile had been his hope, for the moment, at least, of reaching the chief's hut unseen. The sun was down only a few hours, and in the village the natives still moved around, their shadows thrown long by the leaping flames. Soon the moon would be up, rendering Gregg's attempt more hazardous than ever. Its light would be as revealing as that of day.

He began to wish himself safely back aboard the Sheila; but some inherent obstinacy kept him from admitting failure, and he lay there, face close to the ground, until the fire died down and one by one the lounging figures vanished. A razor-backed pig came snuffling at his heels, and scampered into the undergrowth when he moved. The clearing seemed deserted, but even now Gregg lay for some time as motionless as the greenery that his body crushed, while stillness crept over the unlighted huts. By

then the moon glow showed brightly above the dark mass of the trees.

Silent as a shadow Gregg crossed to the chief's hut and silent as a shadow he entered it. He went with his finger on the trigger of his revolver, and with a grin on his lips, for the absolute audacity of his attempt had occurred to him. If he was seen, no questions would be asked, no chance given him to explain. His head would join those others in the men's hut, and his body would go to the ovens for baking and basting.

Halted just inside the door of the hut, he listened. Tuomi's breathing came to him, heavy, irregular, seeming to indicate that the chief's dreams were troubled. Gregg, sharp-eared, distinguished from it the softer breath of a woman. It was the woman he had to fear. She had taken no opiate to dull her senses, and these natives slept as lightly as hunted animals.

As nearly as he could, he located the sleepers, and went toward the chief an inch at a time. Once the woman's breathing faltered, and she sighed. Gregg felt sweat break out on his forehead, until with a little rustle she settled herself more comfortably, and her respirations grew light and even; but some long moments passed before the skipper relaxed.

Luckily, the chief was the closer to him. He bent and put out one hand with infinite caution. His groping fingers touched what he sought—Tuomi's head. There could be no mistaking the great mop of hair held stiff from the skull with clay.

An instant later Gregg's fingers closed upon the rag that held the pearl. He was straightening when Tuomi awoke with a sudden grunt, perceived the intruder, and thrust at him a knife, gashing his thigh. Either the chief had given the medicine to one of his women, or he had taken it so long before sundown that its effect had worn off.

Gregg swore, and struck downward with the barrel of his revolver. Tuomi fell back, but now the woman was awake and screaming. Realizing that speed and luck alone would save him, Gregg darted from the hut. The moon had swum into sight, pale and slender, lighting the island faintly. Behind Gregg, the village burst into life like a wasps' nest hit by a stone.

The fugitive ran as he had never run before, the pearl in his left hand, the revolver in his right. As he reached the edge

of the clearing, a native sprang into view. Gregg shot the man, cleared the dead body in his stride, and went on. It was very dark among the trees, and several times he fell; but he still led his pursuers when the beach and the lagoon came in sight. Now he had to trust entirely to luck.

With a yell to his own men, he plunged into the water, and swam desperately toward the boat. A bullet kicked up spray close to his face and screamed away over the reef. Bates, the mate, stood up in the stern of the boat and began to shoot as coolly as if this was all a game. Strong arms lifted Gregg from the water. As the boat turned, he looked back. The beach was deserted but for two still figures that lay sprawling on its silvery whiteness; but the firing from the bush, inaccurate and wild, continued until the Sheila was reached.

"That finishes our trade with Tuomi," Gregg thought, watching Anohe slip astern as the schooner gathered way. He was not sorry—he had the pearl to content him.

He examined it in the sunlight the following morning, while the Sheila plowed her way across a sparkling blue sea, and found it even more wonderful than he had supposed. Never had there been a pearl to equal this! He turned it over and over between his fingers, admiring the iridescent shimmer of it, each moment discovering new beauties. That rich, deep rose glow—he had never seen anything like it before.

He wondered if the pearl had a history. Coming to him by theft and bloodshed, how had it come to Tuomi? Perhaps it had glimmered on the breast of Sheba, or of some dusky queen from the shores of the Persian Gulf. He thought that that was where the best pearls were found, but wasn't sure.

Anyway, it was worth a great deal of money. Sydney was the place to sell it; but he would show it to MacKenna first. MacKenna knew all about pearls, and could tell him how much to ask. Otherwise he might be swindled.

Gregg slipped the pearl into the fold of his *lava-lava* as Bates approached. Bates knew nothing of it, nor did Gregg see any reason why he should. Gregg was master aboard his own vessel.

In the middle of the following night Gregg awoke from soundest slumber for no apparent reason. Like most men who live

in danger, he was instantly on the alert, peering with keen eyes into the baffling darkness of the cabin. He saw nothing until a figure moved between his bunk and the porthole. Then he jumped.

A fist caught him on the side of the head, dazing him, but failing to stop him. He found himself on the floor, with a heaving, struggling body underneath, throwing him from side to side. Hands sought for his throat, and thumbs pressed for his windpipe, strangling him. Gregg tore them away and smashed with both fists at the face he could not see. The man beneath him ceased to struggle.

"Who the hell are you?" Gregg demanded, ready for another blow.

"Bates," came the answer in a choking voice. "For God's sake let me up, cap'n! You've busted my jaw."

Gregg rose to his feet, felt around for matches, and lit the lamp. Bates, with blood all over his chin, sat on the floor, groaning.

"What were you after?" Gregg asked savagely.

Bates was silent.

"Come on! Out with it—or, by God, I'll start on you again!"

"The pearl," Bates mumbled, nursing his jaw.

"The pearl?" Gregg laughed shortly. The pearl was in a snakeskin bag on a string around his neck. "How did you know I had it?"

"Saw you playin' with it," Bates answered sullenly, "and guessed that was what you went ashore for."

"You guess too much for me, so we'll part company at Sydney; and if you come in here again there'll be gun play, see? Here, let me have a look at your jaw. Hell, that's not broken, man!"

"I thought it was."

Bates went out, slamming the door heavily behind him.

After that the skipper bolted his door by night, and went about warily by day, giving boats and deckhouses a wide berth, and keeping his hand close to the revolver in his belt; but Sydney was reached without further incident, after a fast run.

The Sheila docked late in the evening, and night had fallen before Gregg stretched his legs on the wharf. Too late, now, he thought, to see MacKenna; to-morrow would do as well. A drink and a game of cards wouldn't do him any harm. He never



drank aboard ship. Men who did that in the islands died quickly, as a rule.

### III

TEN minutes later he was one of the crowd about a table in the center of which a lamp stood smoking evilly. Beyond the red pool of light shadows grew deep and deeper, spread to the corners of the room. At the table were seated a few sailors, playing poker with a white-faced man dressed as a gentleman of leisure, but poor taste. When, after some time, one of the sailors dropped out, Gregg took his place.

"Friend," said the white-faced man, who owned the house, "perdooce your money."

Gregg produced his money and bought some chips, and the game was on.

A born gambler, Gregg played recklessly. A glass of whisky stood by his hand. As he sipped, warmth stole through his veins and little spots of color were born in his tanned cheeks. The white-faced man watched him with the eyes of a snake.

At first Gregg won, then he lost a little, then he won again. Excitement gripped him. He had a poor head for the game, but he had all the Celt's superstition, finding significance in the most trivial incident, ready always to follow his luck. The smallest success was enough to make him risk three or four times as much money as he had won, while losses only strengthened a determination to get his revenge.

For some time he won and lost alternately, and then he began to lose steadily. He bought more chips, and lost them to the long-fingered gambler. He bought more, and more, until his pockets were empty. Then he shoved back his chair and rose.

"Cleaned?" said the gambler.

Gregg nodded, grinning. He was a good loser.

"Nothing more on you?"

Gregg remembered then that he had the pearl; but he wasn't going to lose that.

"Sit down and have another hand, anyway," said the gambler, pushing forward some chips. "We'll take your word."

"You needn't," Gregg said. He took out the pearl. "I'll bet this against all you've got there, on one cut."

He set the pearl in the center of the table, close to the lamp, so that it glimmered like a bubble of blood. A silence fell around the table, the faces in the ruddy glow grew tense. A man stretched out his hand toward the gleaming thing.

"Hands off!" Gregg said sharply. He was cool, dangerous. He slid the barrel of his revolver over the edge of the table, brought the weapon into view, and placed it before him. "One cut," he said to the gambler.

"One cut?"

"You heard me."

The gambler shrugged, shuffled the cards and slapped them down.

"You first," he said.

Gregg cut a six.

The gambler cut an ace. He took the pearl and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket. He was watching Gregg.

The loser laughed and stood up. Voices broke out through the room. He stepped back, joining the circle of spectators. The gambler seemed to forget him.

Hours had passed before Gregg, watching with eyes made piercing by the sea, saw the gambler slip a card from his palm into the hand he held.

"Hey, there!" Gregg said. "You blasted cheat!"

The white-faced man carried a little pistol in a holster under his shoulder; but he barely had it out when Gregg broke his arm with a shot and dived for him across the table.

The lamp crashed to the floor and went out with a splutter of flame and a rising smell. Gregg had the gambler by the throat, strangling him. The little pistol cracked twice, and Gregg was conscious of a burning pain across his side and a warm drench of blood. He felt for the gambler's wrist, twisted it cruelly, and then went through his pockets until he found the pearl.

The room, he realized as he stood up, was in an uproar. A pistol stabbed flame toward the ceiling; men shouted and swore horribly. Gregg plunged for the door, shoulder down. He cannoned into a man, and a hard-driven fist took him in the ribs. He lashed out, hit something, and went on until the wall stopped him. Behind, some one roared for a light.

Gregg felt for the door, found it, pulled it open, and half ran, half fell, down the narrow stairs. The door into the street was a pale rectangle framing a bulky figure. He heard whistles shrilling and feet pounding on the cobbles.

"Halt!"

Coming from the darkness like a runaway steer, Gregg knocked the policeman

sprawling, gained the open, and ran. The policeman picked himself up and followed. It was after midnight, and the streets were deserted, lit by the stars. Gregg tucked in his elbows, threw back his head, and lengthened his stride.

Sailors as a rule are no great runners, but the skipper, though wounded, made fair enough speed, and his pursuer was winded. The race was more or less level until Gregg began to feel the unaccustomed strain, and little by little slowed, wondering if he should stand and fight it out while yet some breath remained to him. So far as possible, he had always avoided brushes with the law; and he ran on, keeping to the darker streets, dodging around corners, in an attempt to shake off the relentless man behind.

The end came suddenly. He turned into a narrow street and saw in a doorway a slender figure all in white. He would have passed without a second glance, but she stretched out a hand to halt him, and motioned toward the dark shadow of the door.

Hesitating not an instant, he slipped in, and she followed. Gregg heard the stealthy sound of bolts slid home. Then the thud of the policeman's foot went by heavily outside.

As he stood there, in absolute darkness, a warm arm came to rest about his neck, and fingers touched his cheek. Then soft lips brushed his.

"Dave!"

The fragrance of scent, faint, elusive, came to Gregg's nostrils. He wondered how far the policeman had gone, and if it would be safe, as yet, to venture into the street.

"I heard the whistles, Dave," the girl said softly, "and I thought it might be you."

Gregg knew she was lying, but that didn't lessen his gratitude to her. If in reality there was a Dave, he would have known her door without guidance into it.

"I'm not Dave," Gregg said.

"Not Dave?" A world of wonder was in her voice. Then she laughed, very gently. "It doesn't matter, does it?"

She was very close to him, there in the warm darkness, and he felt some compunction as he pushed her away and moved toward the door. She clung to him, murmuring reproaches and endearments, her arms about him. He was gentle as he could be, loosing her fingers; but she began to cry like a hurt child, and he, under his breath,

began to swear. When at length he was again in the open, and the girl was a vague white figure in the darkness of the hall, he felt like a brute.

"I'm sorry!" he muttered.

A sob answered him, and he went swearing down the street. The wound in his side was a sharp agony, and one leg of his trousers was heavy with blood. That worried him not at all. The bullets had torn their way through loose flesh, and he could stand a little blood-letting. The girl, with her warm arms and gentle voice, had hurt him more than the gambler with his pistol.

Gregg was halfway to the docks before he realized that he had lost the pearl. Slowly and deliberately he went through his pockets. He knew he had dropped it into the left hand pocket of his coat, but perhaps—no, it was gone!

He stiffened suddenly. The girl! A wry grin curved his lips in admiration of her daring. She must have picked his pocket while she made love to him. He set out briskly for the narrow street.

#### IV

THE door, when he reached it, was bolted; the windows flanking it were dark and blank, like blind eyes. He knocked, but got no answer; the house was silent as a tomb. A trial of the windows proved them latched, but Gregg was in no mood to be deterred by trifles. Jamming his elbow through a pane, he reached in with one hand, slipped the latch, opened the window, and crawled into the room.

Halting there to listen, he fancied he heard sounds of stirring overhead. Groping his way about, he found an open door, through which he went. Now, he guessed, he was in the hall, and after a few moments' search he found the stairs. He had about half completed a cautious ascent when a man in trousers and shirt, carrying a lamp, appeared on the landing above.

"Who's there?"

Gregg kept silence.

"There's nobody there, I tell you," the man called over one shoulder.

"Go and see, you coward!" came the girl's contemptuous voice.

Hesitantly the man came down the stairs, holding the lamp before him. When he saw Gregg, he set the lamp down on a step above, and crouched, a sliver of steel in his right hand. With his arm raised he jumped. Gregg, quick as a cat, twisted

sidewise and took him around the knees. Together they crashed down the stairs into the hall, and there, in the darkness, they fought until Gregg hammered his opponent's head against the floor and the man went limp. Gregg struck a match and examined him narrowly, lifting one eyelid. He was unconscious.

Leaving him, Gregg went up the stairs, took the lamp, and sought the girl. He found her, fully dressed, sullenly awaiting him, in a room off the landing.

"I want that pearl," Gregg said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," replied the girl. "What have you done to my father?"

"That's a pity!"

Gregg twirled the revolver in his brown fingers.

"You needn't think I'm afraid of you."

"I don't; but unless you hand it over I'll beat your father over the head with this until he hands in his checks. Come across!"

She lost her refinement then, and said more insulting things to him than he had heard in the past year. He listened grimly; then, when she paused, he turned toward the door.

"Come back!"

"You're getting sense, eh?" he said, glancing back.

She slipped one hand down the front of her dress, produced a little bag of silk, and from this, reluctantly, the pearl. More reluctantly still, she handed it to Gregg.

He thanked her ironically, and, leaving her there, descended to the hall, where the man was beginning to take some slight interest in his own plight. Gregg put down the lamp and opened the door. He reached the Sheila without further incident.

The next morning he was stiff and sore, but that did not prevent his visiting MacKenna. MacKenna was a retired pearling skipper who knew more about the milky gems than any other man in the South Seas, and who freely dispensed his knowledge. He and Gregg were old friends.

"I've brought you a pearl," Gregg said. "You're going to open your eyes when you see it, Mac!"

"Man, I'm not," said MacKenna; "not if I'm right in what I think, anyway."

"Eh?" said Gregg.

"Let me see it."

Gregg passed it across the table. The old Scotsman grunted, twirled it in his fingers, and tossed it back.

"A veray good imitation," he said.

"You're the fifth in the last month to bring me one. Some clever boy is tradin' them off to the niggers for copra, an' makin' a good thing of it; but nobody who knew anything about pearls would be fooled."

"You're serious?" Gregg demanded.

"Aye am I, man."

So Tuomi's story had been true!

Gregg swore, tramping up and down the room. He would like to meet the fellow who had sent these bogus pearls drifting around the South Seas. He had risked death, and spilled blood, his own included, for nothing. He was as sore, just now, as if he had been keelhauled. He had tempted his mate to theft, and discharged him for it. He had threatened a woman.

He halted at the window and looked down across a sweep of roofs to the lovely harbor. Hawk-eyed, he found the Sheila. Well—

He began to laugh.

### PERVERSITY

MARY's heart's a still, cool room;  
Tranquil hyacinths in bloom;  
Mary smiles and bids me rest,  
Waits on me—her only guest,  
Sets the softest chair for me,  
Hovers gently, making tea.

Peggy's heart's a dancing school;  
Enter any hopeful fool;  
He who goes there takes a chance  
Of winning Peggy for a dance;  
One time Peggy danced with me—  
How can any one drink tea?

*Mella Russell McCallum*

# The Trail of Courage

IT IS NO WONDER THAT MORE THAN ONCE, ON HIS PERILOUS JOURNEY THROUGH THE NORTHERN SNOWS,  
JEAN BAPTISTE LAROCQUE DID NOT  
KNOW WHAT TO DO NEXT

By William Merriam Rouse

IT was in the little shop kept by the mayor of Rivière des Chiens that destiny turned over a new leaf for Jean Baptiste Larocque. Something in the heart of that battle-scarred young woodsman told him there was trouble hanging in the smoke-draped, baking air of that cluttered room; but he had never been one to turn away from a fight, and what other trouble could there be for a man who had never been ill, and who was confident that he feared nothing, from a charging moose to a bullet fired from ambush? He had met both, this Jean Baptiste.

His favorite enemy, Tite Simard of the apelike face, was sitting with an elbow on the counter as he listened to the words of M. Joseph Gaveau, mayor and lawful ruler of this little cluster of whitewashed stone houses on the shore of the St. Lawrence. *Bien*, let Simard listen! He could not understand half of what any intelligent man said.

Jean Baptiste stretched out his sinewy legs for greater comfort. He sat there and smoked, with his brush of black hair resting against a show case and his ponderous chest and shoulders relaxed in a broken armchair. He was not paying much attention to what was said by those others—*habitants*, and wood choppers, and men of the village.

He drew slow puffs of contentment, while the yellow light of the big lamp streamed down upon a face inscribed with the marks of ancient conflict. They lent distinction rather than ugliness, these scars. There were at least half a dozen of them, for this Larocque was a man like a bulldog, and in a fight he had never yet been known to stop short of victory or unconsciousness.

His will was his way, and he persisted in it; and that gift or curse of character had made all his trouble, just as it had preserved him alive up to this night.

The pointed chin of Jean Baptiste went back to a wide jaw, and in the pair of dark blue eyes with which he looked upon his northern world there was a warning and a challenge. They were not bad eyes, those deep set and sometimes twinkling watchmen, but upon occasion they had made other men step out of the trail without need of a blow.

To-night their lights were smoldering low, for Jean Baptiste had marched long and far from his camp in the Laurentians. It was biting weather—an evening of knife-like cold, with five feet of snow in the woods and a blizzard hinted by the distant gray haze that had been gathering along the mountain tops at sundown.

"Yes!" boomed the great voice of Mayor Gaveau, resonant from the thickness of his middle, where his chest had slipped down, apparently, to hide his feet from him for the rest of his life. "But yes! Without doubt it is the will of *le bon Dieu* that they should die!"

"It is hard to die like that," said Édouard Paquet, in the even and pitying voice which not only made him beloved of the whole parish, but, by the law of the attraction of opposites, made him the friend of Jean Baptiste Larocque.

"Me, I prefer something quick, like a knife! Then four fingers of whisky *blanc*, and my head in the lap of a pretty girl!"

This was that most abominable Tite Simard speaking, and here Jean Baptiste became conscious that he had been listening to the latter part of the conversation. This



last speaker had roused him; for Simard was his perpetual enemy, just as Paquet was his friend.

The hatred had grown out of many an old rivalry—trap lines, women, cards. *Sacré*, it was an insult that this dog should want to die in the same way that Jean Baptiste himself wanted to die! What right had this ape, this thief and liar, to die like a man? Faint lightnings came into the eyes of Larocque, and he listened with attention.

"Some one ought to go to them," Paquet meditated aloud, with trouble in the kindly eyes which were so much like those of a dog. "It should be but two days' march to their camp."

"A blizzard comes on," said the mayor solemnly, with a shake of his head. "Besides that—"

"A blizzard?" This from Simard, and he threw a grin and a sly sneer in the direction of Jean Baptiste. "What's a blizzard to a real woodsman?"

Larocque drew in his legs and sat erect. Was it that Simard desired a fight? It could hardly be that he did, here in the shop, but one could never tell what was coming in dealing with a scoundrel like him. *Eh bien*, let come what would!

"I am of more than half a mind to go to them, me!" said Paquet, with a glance at Larocque. "Tell us again, *monsieur le maire*, how this matter stands. I do not think my friend Jean Baptiste was listening at first."

"Certainly," said M. Gaveau, and it was plain that he guessed what was going on in the minds of Paquet, Larocque, and Simard. "It is like this—at sundown a chopper came in from a camp beyond the Montmorency River. He said there were two men sick and starving in a cabin on Lac Noël. He left them a little pork and flour. I did not learn much, for he seemed in a vast hurry to get on toward Ste. Anne de Beaupré. He—"

"Poof!" interrupted Simard. "No doubt he was one of those religious fools. He left the men to die, and he was hurrying to the shrine of Ste. Anne!"

"That is neither here nor there," said Paquet quietly. "There is but one thing to think of. Is it that these men are to be left to die by us?"

"I would not ask any of the men of the village to go to them," replied the mayor, "for—"

"I will go, *monsieur le maire*," announced Jean Baptiste, knocking out his pipe and permitting himself a faint smile in the direction of Tite Simard. "I know that trail."

"*Sacré!*" roared Simard. "I was about to say that I would go!"

"Well!" M. Gaveau rubbed his stomach thoughtfully. "It is a very serious matter, and—"

"My wife and I are about to be blessed with another child," said Paquet, to Jean Baptiste. "He will be François Xavier Charles Étienne, I hope, and the youngest of seven, as all the world knows. However, two men march more safely than one, and I will go with you, my friend. I can get back before I shall be needed at home."

"Now it will be a mere pleasure trip!" exclaimed Larocque; and his face lighted with a smile. "It will be nothing for us two, M. Gaveau, and we might as well start at once."

"I have not yet explained all that the chopper told me," said the mayor patiently, but with no hint of the customary cheerfulness upon his round face. "He took me aside just as he was about to go on toward Ste. Anne de Beaupré, and—"

It seemed as if the mayor of Rivière des Chiens would never be able to finish what he had to tell, for just at this moment the heavy door of the shop opened slowly, to the tinkling of the bell that gave warning of an arrival, and a little girl came, red-cheeked and round-eyed, out of the night.

"Alma Rose!" cried Édouard Paquet. "What is it, my daughter?"

"The doctor is at our house," she panted. "He desires that you come at once."

Without a word, Paquet took the child by the hand and hurried from the shop. There were shrugs and lifted eyebrows. The wave of cold air that he and Alma Rose had let in mingled with the smoke and heat of the room. Then Simard broke the silence; and there was a gleam of malice and of triumph in his small eyes.

"I'll go in his place, Larocque," he said. "You know very well that I can stand up better on a hard match than Paquet."

Now Jean Baptiste was angered by this insult to his friend much more than he would have been by one to himself. He knew the motive. Simard had been balked of the glory of a rescue alone, and he was determined to share what glory there might be. Unless by treachery he could take it all.

For an instant Larocque debated whether he ought not to fight Simard before he started; but that would not end their feud. Jean Baptiste told himself that nothing short of death would end it. He shrugged. It would not help the men at Lac Noël for him to humor his personal grudges. He did desire to save them; and for whatever glory there might be in it he cared not at all.

"Come on, then!" he barked suddenly, addressing Simard. "We'll go together, and we'll find out who is the better man on the trail in a blizzard!"

"So be it!" spoke Joseph Gaveau, in a low voice. "Go, you two enemies! Go together on this trip, and at the end of it, when you shall have found what you shall find, then truly you will learn who is the better man. I say no more."

## II

It was the second day. The two enemies had gone more than half the distance on their errand of mercy, and death had been drawing very close to them since the afternoon before. Tite Simard knew it, lying in his blankets, with his small eyes half closed. Jean Baptiste Larocque, tending fire in front of the shelter he had made against the blizzard, knew it even more clearly than Simard; for Larocque was sober, hungry, and frostbitten, but Tite Simard was still dazed from the effects of a quart of brandy he had drunk the night before, and by the pain of a broken leg. Simard was helpless, and by that fact the feet of Jean Baptiste were shackled.

That start from Rivière des Chiens had been well made. Each man carried a light pack, but enough to carry them through and to supply the needs of the starving choppers until some game could be found or help brought from another camp. The two had gone forth in the starlight with the cheers of the men of the village in their ears and a picture of the unusually solemn face of the mayor in their minds. Simard had grunted his opinion of M. Gaveau, and Jean Baptiste had wondered, finally to dismiss the mayor with the thought that he was growing old and overcautious.

There was but one direct route to Lac Noël, across the Montmorency at a point where there was a ford in summer; and there was no difficulty in keeping to the trail in ordinary weather. Through most of the night Simard and Larocque had

marched, making camp for a few hours' sleep toward dawn. Then breakfast, and a dogged pushing on under a gray blanket that had drawn itself across the heavens while they slept.

This was the preparation for the storm that was to come. That afternoon the heralds of the blizzard stung their cheeks—small frozen pellets utterly unlike ordinary flakes of snow. There arose a little wind, slanting these pellets down. There came a thickening of the air, and darkness in mid-afternoon—or, rather, a half light which was more depressing than actual night would have been.

It was at this time, when they stopped briefly to make tea and eat some cold pork and bread, that Larocque caught Simard stealing from the bottle of brandy which they had brought for emergencies—for the men in the cabin, if need be. Tite had urged a half dozen bottles, but the mayor had been firm about the quantity; and Larocque, who had never been accused of any desire to be a saint, had agreed that a man who drank on the march was able to march neither fast nor far.

"Stop it!" he said to Tite, with his rifle suddenly slung up across his arm.

Simard, snarling, had put the bottle back into the pack of Jean Baptiste, where M. Gaveau had placed it. Except for these words they had hardly spoken, and they did not speak again until the time of the accident.

In crossing the Montmorency, Tite Simard went through thin ice. These things come suddenly. One moment he was an able-bodied man, marching confidently on stout snowshoes, with a rifle and a pack which was priceless in that wilderness. The next moment he was head under water at a spot where the swiftness of the current had prevented the forming of strong ice.

His rifle went. He had to shed his pack, which he did by a miracle; and it was only because Jean Baptiste crawled out to him, at no small danger to himself, that Tite Simard came back to the world of the living.

A leg sagged and bent under Simard. Jean Baptiste held him up. He became incased in a sheath of frozen clothing, while they were deciding that the leg was broken. Slowly Larocque half carried him up the bank of the river and to a spot where he could make camp and build a windbreak.

Of course, Tite's snowshoes were gone

with his rifle and pack; but they would have done him no good. Undeniably one leg was broken below the knee. It was on this account that Jean Baptiste said nothing when Simard clutched for the bottle and clung to it after he had had all he could swallow; for Larocque knew that in all probability Tite would never leave that place. Let him have what comfort he could get!

So now, on this black morning after a night of sleep taken between intervals of building up the fire, Jean Baptiste smoked and thought in a never ending circle. He could see nothing but death for Tite. For himself, if he pushed on at once, there was a chance, but not a very promising chance. More than half their provisions were gone; and of the rest decency demanded that he leave a share for Simard.

Also, if Tite kept up the fire, as he could with a good stock of dry wood, he might live a long time. He was tough. He needed all the food there was, and more. He would die at last; and then, perhaps, only because Larocque had not stayed with him.

But one could not stay until spring, *bon Dieu!* They would both die there, ill equipped as they were for making a permanent camp; and what of those others at Lac Noël?

What of the blizzard that was raging? It had come on slowly, as if to gain force. Now it was after their lives, and it increased in power. It was twilight when it should have been broad day; and only that Jean Baptiste had found a thick clump of firs for his hasty camp they might not have been able to hold out. The snow was banked up around them; across open country it would be sweeping in an almost level blast.

Jean Baptiste became conscious that the jet-black gaze of Tite was fastened on him with a look of mingled hatred and pain. Groaning, Simard lifted himself to an elbow. He shook the bottle, and flung it away with a rattling string of curses. Then he dropped back and filled his mouth with snow from a mittened hand. If he knew that Larocque had given him one of his own blankets, he did not allow it to be seen that he knew.

"I am finished!" he said in a thick voice. "Well, stupid! Why don't you go on?"

Jean Baptiste looked down upon him in silence for many seconds before he replied to that question. He considered the sunken

nose and the fringe of hair that grew low upon a troubled forehead. Of Tite Simard he knew things which he would have paled even to think of himself. What good was that man there on the bed of evergreen boughs? Or was he far enough removed from the brute to be called a man? Those choppers at the end of the march were men with families, no doubt—hard working, and no worse than the run of men.

"I don't know," he replied at last, drawing his lungs full of smoke and blowing it out slowly. "Do you want me to stay, Tite Simard?"

"Stay with me?" Simard laughed with a sound like the grating of metal. "I'd rather die alone than to see you with your legs under you! Get out!"

The man had courage; and now Jean Baptiste knew why he had hesitated. In this one matter of courage they were akin—brothers under their hatred of each other.

Jean Baptiste thought hard, but still to no purpose. His thoughts chased themselves like little pigs running around in a pen. He did not know what to do. Was this, then, one of those matters which must decide itself—one of those affairs too big for human wisdom?

Larocque had always believed that he had very little to do with that friend of Mayor Joseph Gaveau, *le bon Dieu*, and so now he decided to leave his action to what he called chance. He removed himself, Jean Baptiste Larocque, from the decision. He made up his mind to follow his nose, like a good woodsman. The trouble was that he did not know which way his nose was leading him.

### III

It was not until the totally unexpected happened that Jean Baptiste realized that he had been doing the only wise thing for him to do, which was sitting still and waiting. He had turned to look at the storm again when out of the gray thickness that surrounded the camp staggered a darker blot, like a black pea coming to the surface in *soupe aux pois*. That it was a man Larocque knew instantly; and when he had recovered from the first shock of surprise, and remembered that this was the trail north, he leaped up to help.

What little of the stranger's face was visible was spotted hard and white with frost, and his lips were drawn back from yellow teeth. Evidently he was a chopper

on his way down to the old parishes, and hard pressed by something, or he would not travel in this weather.

He could not talk at once. Jean Baptiste rubbed his frostbite with snow before he let him move close to the fire; but in a matter of fifteen minutes the man had his *tuque* pushed back from his dank hair and his pipe going, and he was ready to drink hot tea. For talking, however, he was not quite so ready. His eyes had taken in Tite Simard, had estimated Larocque. Ever and again they looked longingly toward the south.

"It is not a day to march," said Jean Baptiste. "You come, no doubt, from the Lac Noël country?"

"But yes!" The man hesitated, and went on cautiously. "Me, I am Alphonse Bilodeau from a ten-man camp one day's march west of Lac Noël. I live in Château Richer. You know that place, perhaps?"

"Ah, yes!" answered Larocque thoughtfully. "Something serious takes you home? Sickness?"

"Sickness?" Bilodeau jumped half out of his clothes. "Me, I am not sick!"

"I meant at your home. A man does not march in this weather for a small cause."

"Sure!" agreed Bilodeau uneasily. "Your friend, he is sick also?"

"I broke my leg," said Tite, speaking for the first time, although his button eyes had not left the face of the stranger. "I don't get sick, me. It's people like you that get sick!"

Bilodeau flung him a look, half of venom and half of fear. Then his glance dropped before the stare of Larocque, and he began to wind his long scarf around his neck. He belted in his jacket with the ends of it, and tied them carefully.

"I go," he said. "Yes, I am needed at home."

Now Jean Baptiste knew that the man was in some way lying, but he did not know how. This Alphonse Bilodeau could see that they were short of food, and it was no true man who would go on and leave them as they were, unless he were driven by some need greater than their own.

"Take his pack away from him!" roared Simard.

"We are in great need," said Jean Baptiste, lifting his hand for peace. "A man with a broken leg cannot march. We were on our way to help some choppers in a

camp on the shore of Lac Noël. Word of them was brought to Rivière des Chiens."

Bilodeau stared, open-mouthed and bewildered. Slowly he picked up his pack, and Jean Baptiste thought he was going to put it on. Instead, he opened it and gave them all he had save enough to carry him down to the villages along the St. Lawrence. It was not a great quantity, but it was enough to bring a little ray of hope striking into the gloom of Larocque's mind.

"Now I shall march," said Bilodeau in a low voice, and he made ready; but when he picked up his rifle, and turned to plunge into the storm, he made a slight movement of the head and beckoned with his eyes to Jean Baptiste.

Halting just beyond the corner of the little structure of woven branches, Bilodeau wheeled upon Larocque and spoke, with a face that grew livid underneath the wind-whipped red, the tan, the marks of frostbite.

"Is that all that's the matter with him?" he asked, nodding toward the shack. "A broken leg?"

"I have said so," replied Jean Baptiste.

"And you and he were going to Lac Noël! Then thank Heaven for the broken leg! Do you know that there is smallpox in that country? Do you know that those two choppers have it? There is but one cabin on the lake. I looked in at the window, for I wanted to stop and get warm, and—I saw one of them in his bunk!"

For an instant the muffled form, the spot of color that was Bilodeau's face, danced before the vision of Jean Baptiste. They floated there, and then were gone.

Larocque drew a hand across his eyes. Bilodeau was gone in fact. He had vanished toward safety.

Jean Baptiste stood motionless, stunned. The plague of that country had come again, as it did at intervals, to sweep the camps and perhaps to spread to the villages. So it was to this fate that he was going, if he left Tite Simard for the sake of the two choppers up there on the lonely shore of Lac Noël! That was no death for a man like Jean Baptiste Larocque to die!

Before the coming of Bilodeau, Larocque had not known what to do, but now he was utterly bewildered. He did not want to leave Tite Simard, but to stay with him now might be cowardice.

Was Jean Baptiste a coward? Never



before had he thought so. In the fights of the camps, where feet and fists and teeth were used without preference, he had not been less than the bravest. On the great St. Lawrence he had faced death with a laugh. Knife and rifle bullet had had no terrors for him, nor the bite of cold and the dark threat of such a storm as this; but smallpox! What a death for a man to die! On his back! Weak as a woman!

It would be easy to make Simard an excuse to stay where he was, or even to turn back. It might be that he could make some kind of a sled and try to drag Tite back to Rivière des Chiens. Jean Baptiste stepped back under the slanting roof of boughs and met the buttony eyes of Simard.

"He didn't talk low enough!" chuckled Tite. "I heard him! Now where's the courage of Jean Baptiste Larocque? You don't dare to leave me and go. You lack the courage. You're as white as a girl!"

Jean Baptiste jerked himself erect, and his eyes flamed blue lightnings. Then he bowed his head. Tite Simard had spoken true words. He was afraid!

He looked at Tite steadily for a long moment. With a desperation he had never known before he went down within himself, seeking courage. He sought, and at the end of his little time of agony he found what he sought. He turned his thought to those others and their need, and forgot himself. And then only was he able to speak.

"I am going to go," he said, "and not only that, you blackguard! Because you are a man of courage, I shall take you with me. Yes, I shall save you and them, if it takes days—a week. You shall go with me. I can get there, and take you, and give these sick men care, if they are still alive; but whether I can survive the great sickness I don't know, and I don't care. Think of that, scoundrel, and laugh if you can!"

#### IV

JEAN BAPTISTE staggered to a halt, and stood swaying. His eyes burned deep in their sockets, red-rimmed; but they still burned. The cheeks which had been full and smooth-shaven in Rivière des Chiens were sunken now, and bristling with a beard. With the slow, stiff movements of an old man he got out of an improvised rope harness that had been cutting into his arms and shoulders for many a weary hour. He dropped the tump line of his pack from

his forehead, and turned and looked down upon Tite Simard.

Simard was no better off in some ways than the heart-weary man who had dragged him over the miles from the camp on the Montmorency. In spite of pain and cold, he had had a degree of rest upon the rough, tobogganlike sled which Larocque had put together with hand ax and knife. Anger, more than anything else, had wasted his energies, for since the breaking of his leg he had been as dependent as a child upon the ministrations of Jean Baptiste. He owed his life to the man he hated, and they both knew it.

While the blizzard raged at its worst, Larocque had worked at the sled, cooked, kept a fire, and melted snow that they might make tea. He had filled his companion's pipe, and held a coal to it. He had set Tite's leg, and after a fashion put splints on it; and meanwhile they had cursed each other with a heartiness never excelled between the Circle and the St. Lawrence.

Now Jean Baptiste stood at his journey's end. A change came over his face, like the blowing out of a candle in the gray dawn of a winter day. Cold had seeped through living flesh to the marrow of his bones; and it was for the privilege of dying by the dread disease that he had endured a great agony.

Down at the edge of the white, level field, which was Lac Noël, there was a log cabin, half hidden under a great drift of snow which curled over the roof and around the chimney. A faint stain of smoke hung in the air, proving that there was still life within. People to be taken care of! A man might bury the dead without too much risk, but if he had to care for the sick—

"They live!" said Tite hoarsely, with his teeth showing. "You're done for, Larocque!"

"They live, and they are very sick," replied Jean Baptiste, with his mind not upon Simard, but upon the cabin. "One of them has kept the snow pushed away from the windows, and the door is clear; but see that handful of firewood! That is not the work of a man with half his strength!"

"You can still back out," taunted Simard.

Jean Baptiste wheeled upon him with mittened fists growing tight. Was there not already enough to bear? Must this

devil ride upon his back all the way? But he knew how to take his revenge.

"At least you, flat on your back, will be as safe as an old woman at home by the fire," he growled. "I go inside alone."

Tite Simard pulled himself up to his elbows. He glared, breathing like a horse that has gone too far and too fast.

"You will not leave me outside—all the time?"

"Yes, I shall make camp for you. *Nom de Dieu*, are you not an invalid?"

"*Maudit animal!*" screamed Simard. "I'll kill you!"

Jean Baptiste laughed, mocking him.

"Kill me? You can't even kill yourself!"

The thick lips of the man on the sled trembled, and he dropped back. For the first time Larocque saw his enemy stripped and broken. The button eyes became drenched.

"Jean Baptiste!" pleaded Tite. "For the love of God, give me a chance to die like a man—to die as well as you do! Take me in there with you! Do not shame me! Have pity!"

The heart of Jean Baptiste Larocque—the heart that had been so weary and cold—warmed a little. At first he thought this was weakness. Then he realized that he could not help it, whatever it was; and at last he knew that hatred was melting away from his heart, burning away in a fire which he himself had kindled when he promised himself to come here to Lac Noël. He turned his head away for a moment, staring hard at the rough logs of that snow-bound cabin. When he spoke, his voice, but for its hoarseness, was as gentle as a woman's voice.

"I will come out and bring thee in, Tite," he said. "I swear it; but first I must go alone. It is as hard for me as for thee, my friend!"

Then Jean Baptiste marched steadily up to the door. With the preliminary knock of courtesy, he entered. Then he stood poised beyond the threshold, letting his eyes grow accustomed to the somewhat dim interior as he closed the door behind him.

His glance located a bunk. He saw tumbled blankets, from which a fevered face and fevered eyes looked up at him. Then a small cry cut the stillness of the cabin. He turned. Beside a table at the opposite end of the room a small figure was huddled, close to the light of a win-

dow. Cold-roughened hands closed a book.

"*Mon Dieu, seigneur!*" breathed Jean Baptiste, shaken as he had not been since those hours on the Montmorency. "A woman in this place!"

For although she wore men's clothing—flannel shirt and trousers stuffed into *bot-tes sauvages*—there was no mistaking that this was a girl.

She stood up, leaning upon the table for support. She was a strong little figure, with a steel-like quality even in her physical weakness and her sudden fear of the presence of a strange man. Her skin was like pale lilies, and worn to transparency by suffering. Under a mass of bronze hair blazed eyes as undaunted as Larocque's own—eyes so dark and so clearly courageous that one could not tell their color. Her lips moved.

"Mary—full of grace—"

"I have come to help you," said Jean Baptiste. His voice broke. He started to swear, and swallowed his words. "Two of us—from Rivière des Chiens—with food. Except that my friend outside has a broken leg, all is well. Be comforted, *madame!* We will take care of you and your husband!"

"It is my brother Jacques," she said slowly, coming forward with steps which wavered a little as she left the support of the table. "I am Gabrielle Bissonnet, of Ange Gardien. My brother has a concession for chopping here, *monsieur.*"

At the news that she was not wife, but sister, something leaped up like a flame within Jean Baptiste Larocque. He tried to stifle it—tried to remember that he stood in the presence of death. What right had he to think, at such a time as this, that something went back and forth between this girl and him as songs go back and forth in the woods during the month of May?

"Ah!"

He could not deny himself one more long look, drinking her eyes as one drinks who quenches a great thirst. In a moment he must keep his promise and bring in Tite. He must begin to cut wood and cook food. He flung out a hand toward the bunk.

"The scourge—has it been upon him long?"

"Scourge?" she echoed. "Are you mad? There is no scourge here!"

"He has not got smallpox?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" She made the sign of

the cross. "No—he cut his foot, chopping, and we could get no help. The great sickness is in this country, and those who have come this way from other camps have thought that he had it. They thought I lied. They were afraid!"

Jean Baptiste was lifted as by wings. He was so choked with joy that he found scant words.

"I—we—I thought—"

"Do you mean to say that you came, believing that we had smallpox here?" She stepped closer to him, so that the loveliness

of her hair was within reach of his hand. Her eyes softened; they became violets wet with the morning of a new day.

"Yes, *mademoiselle*," replied Jean Baptiste.

"*Dieu, seigneur!*" She searched his face, his eyes, and it seemed that she found the truth she was seeking. "Then there is such a man as this!"

"Such a man as this," repeated Jean Baptiste, very humbly. "But there is another with me," he added. "I will bring him in."

### FEET

I AM a stone, and the song that I sing  
Is silent as shadows that evening will fling  
Down on the desert where—quiet—the bat  
Whirls from the nest of his brother, the rat.

Deep in my innermost pore, I cry,  
"Multitudes clattering carelessly by—  
Pounding and wearing me lower and thin,  
*Are you not listening under the din?*"

There is the painful crawl of those  
Old with the flight from early snows.  
Feet of the old, remember the flax;  
The clucking of fowls; and the hut where the stacks

Fashioned of corn that was ripened and grown  
Sunned in the sight of the mill and the moan  
Flung from the wheel as it sung of their doom!  
*Why are you tottering where there's no room?*

The horses' thick shoes, belying their tread,  
Strike me with sparks that are angered and red.  
Horses, remember the place where I lay  
In far-fanning grasses to thrum with your neigh!

Horses, as wild and as free as the plain;  
Horses, that never had pulled at a rein,  
Why are you creeping above me with fear?  
*Why are you humbled, and why am I here?*

There is the patter of strong, young feet,  
Hurrying on from street to street—  
I am a stone, for a stone I was made,  
Here in the pavement unmindfully laid.

None of you heed me, but stamp me and go,  
Leaving me weaker, till some day, a blow  
Striking me vitally there where I lack  
Will rive me in two with one slitting crack!

Multiplied then by the power of pain;  
Broken, eventually, to pebbles again;  
Pulverized slowly to dust, I shall fly  
Out in the open and then I shall lie

Close to the loam, until I have sent  
Roots in the darkness for life that is rent  
Out of the spine of creation to be!  
*Feet, I shall trample as you've trampled me!*

Sonia Ruthèle Novák

# The Night Errant

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—HOW CONNIE BLAIR'S AUNT, WHO BELONGED TO THE OLD LAVENDER PERIOD, SENT HER NIECE, A GIRL OF THE NEW VERMILION PERIOD, ON A NOCTURNAL ERRAND WHICH LED HER INTO A WHIRL OF ADVENTURE AND ROMANCE

By Crosby George

Author of "Midnight Music," etc.

IT was a February night in New York—a beautiful night, too, but not dumb; for it was eight o'clock, the hour when the famous night life of the great Sin-by-the-Hudson rises and utters its first peep. All over town strong, handsome waiters were looking to their cover charges, and divorce detectives were oiling up their gum shoes. Chorus pretties were laying aside a good deal, although there was absolutely no rainy day in the offing. Four shows closed down and six new theaters opened up. It was quite a night, and bade fair to become more so before becoming less.

Dick Hunt was not the man to let this gleaming hour pass unnoticed. In fact, the hour of 8 P.M. was being marked with gusto, if not with song, in the fourteen-rooms-and-eight-baths apartment which he helped to inhabit. Through the bedroom in which Dick was enjoying the end of a good day's sleep, the hour burst in shape of a hideous ringing from a healthy alarm clock known to the trade as "Little Earthquake."

Upon the placid face of the sleeper there appeared an annoyed twitch. One eye popped open. It was closed with determination. Its owner had been put to bed by Bates at eight that morning, his usual bedtime hour; but since young Mr. Hunt had a couple of months' sleep to make up, he was intent on staying where he was till the cuckoo cooed ten.

But it was not to be. The Little Earthquake had shattered slumber beyond repair. Both eyes slowly opened. Dick stared at the ceiling. Slowly he became

aware that his head felt large and his tongue arid. Mechanically he rang for Bates.

Bates entered. He had a long face, which gave him the appearance of an austere horse.

"Number twenty-four, Bates," said Dick firmly.

"Quite right, sir."

He skimmed out and was back in two shakes of a cocktail with a tray on which stood a slender glass full of amber liquor. Dick drained the glass, and his head at once ceased to feel large and his tongue parched. He felt peppy. He felt that with just a bite of breakfast he would be armed and visored for a long night's work, chasing boredom. Sitting up, he sparkled.

"The usual grapefruit, *et cetera*, Bates."

"Quite right, sir. Beg pardon, but I have a message."

Dick began to assault his daily quarter of a dozen.

"Your father desires to see you in the library, sir. He's been waiting there two hours for you to rise, sir."

"My good Bates," said Dick, "kindly ask him to tarry till I've had my plunge and appeased the inner man."

"I fear it won't do any good, sir. He—he seems somewhat fummy, sir, if I may say so."

"You have. Fummy?" The fresh, heady strength of youth at the moment of rising to a glorious nightfall was somewhat dampened. "Something wrong in the kingdom, Bates?"

"Precisely, sir." Bates coughed. "In



fact, sir, Mr. Hunt instructed me to quote him as saying that if you did not come at once, you could go jump in the river, sir."

"Which river?"

"I don't know, sir. He didn't say." Bates shivered.

"You look disturbed, Bates. I'm sorry. Well, I'll take the plunge and let the inner man writhe for awhile."

"I should strongly advise against the plunge," said Bates incautiously.

Dick promptly brightened.

"Ah-ha, Bates! You've settled it for me. I'll take the plunge, of course. Thank you!"

Bates bit his lip. His young master had an annoying system. He always carefully asked the valet what to do and then did exactly the opposite. He held that Bates invariably gave wrong advice.

With a happy sense of having scored brilliantly upon the discomfited valet, Dick followed him bathroomward. And then his newly filled cup of joy was suddenly dashed to the polished floor. For a hale, red-faced gentleman with graying hair and angry eyes popped resolutely out of a door and grabbed him by his pyjamaed arm.

"What the hell's been keeping you?" he saluted. "When I say right away in the library, I don't mean next St. Patrick's Day. I can't keep those men all night."

"Men?" queried Dick. "Who?"

His father, who was a self-made man and proud of it, answered him proudly in self-made language; but though the flow of his ideas seemed easy, he made no explanation of his last remark. Dick shuddered with the noise and with curiosity. What was up?

"If you'll stop roaring, I'll come along, dad," he promised. "Yes, I heard you the first five times."

In spite of his aching eardrums, Dick was in fairly high spirits as he reached the library. He expected no worse than the usual violent lecture about his habit of enjoying the daylight hours in slumber. Dick had grown so used to these lectures that he could draw in his ears, so to speak; and hear only a vague rumble of sound, while his untouched brain concentrated all its powers on plans for the night.

But this time he could not help noticing something ominous in the air as he entered the library. For one thing, the room was in darkness. For another, he vaguely dis-

cerned the figures of two men hovering about somewhat in the manner of the witches in "Macbeth." Then, with a strong right arm, his father pushed him into a chair, and roared into the darkness:

"All right! Shoot!"

Instantly there was a faint clicking sound behind Dick. It sounded strangely like a bomb about to express its emotions. Then a brilliant sheet of light flooded the white wall just ahead, to be instantly followed by a flickering picture.

"Why, dad, this is good of you!" said Dick gratefully. "I'm just dippy about parlor movies at the hour of rising. Great Harry!"

For on the flickering wall Dick suddenly recognized a near-by street. His attention riveted upon it. Then, upon the interesting view of house fronts in an early morning light, a human figure entered.

"By George, if he doesn't look like some one I know!" muttered Dick.

The figure was that of a young man who wore evening clothes and an overcoat. He was feeling very happy. His manner of locomotion was a cross between a waltz and a Charleston. His top hat coyly concealed one orb, the other beamed brightly.

"By Jiminy, that's me!" uttered Dick, astounded.

"That's you, all right!" said his father forcefully. "Now just watch yourself!"

The scene snapped to the front of the stately apartment mansion in which the Hunts resided. The film hero approached it. It seemed to be a solemn and awful moment in his life, for he took off his top hat, and, placing it respectfully under his arm, stood with bared head for many seconds. Then he broke into a hearty smile and attempted to reach the doorway by sneaking upon it with a sidewise motion.

The attempt failed. He came out a good twelve and a half feet to the right of the doorway, ricocheted off the wall, and, cutting a smart angle, crashed into a lamp-post. The shock of contact with cold green cast iron aroused our hero to action. He promptly climbed the lamp-post and, as a sign that he had reached farthest north, deposited his top hat upon the very point of it. Then he joyously slid down and landed on his left ear.

"That's enough!" roared Hiram Hunt into the darkness.

The clicking ceased. The picture vanished. The lights shot on. Dick blinked.

"That's how you looked coming home this morning!" bellowed Hiram to his scion. "I had two camera men waiting, and they took this picture of you."

Now that his father mentioned them, Dick vaguely remembered having glimpsed two gentlemen with cameras pointing lenses at him early that morning. He also remembered cheering them on. He saw now that he had been a little hasty.

"You looked like something a Bowery cat wouldn't drag into a two-cent coffee joint," said his father bitterly. "It's got to stop. D'you hear me?"

"Well, dad—"

"Pop!" roared the self-made merchant prince. "Don't you dad me. I'm pop to you, or nothing."

"Pop," said Dick with distaste, "I—"

"I climbed from the bottom of the ladder to the top, and so must you!" thundered Pop Hunt. "I've made up my mind. You're going to get a job, see? I'll give you twenty-four hours, and if you haven't got steady work doing something useful in the world, you can change your address, see?"

"P-p-p-pop!"

"That's all—twenty-four hours. Take it or leave it. You can make your own way from now on or bust!" roared the self-made father, and he strode from the room.

Dick remained sitting. He felt as if the roof and nine stories of the house were sitting on his chest. He wished he had a drink. His pop had often spoken to him on the subject of transforming himself from a happy citizen to a useful one; but to-night the paternal statement carried conviction. Something would have to be done about it; but what?

Dick mournfully regarded the blank wall. His mind was in the same condition. He wished he had a drink.

## II

CONNIE BLAIR wanted something, too. It wasn't a drink. It was something far grander and more respectable. She wanted her freedom—she wanted liberty and release.

She wanted them because of the emotional half hour she was experiencing. The emotion was being supplied in case lots by her aunt, who was weeping on Connie's shoulder. It was a slender shoulder, and Aunt Harriet was no lightweight. That was why Connie longed for release.

From the beginning of the evening she had felt that she would surely be driven to revolution that night, if to nothing worse.

At seven the Blairs had sat down to formal dinner. The formality was their habit since Uncle Peter made his first ten millions. Aunt Harriet was in a gown of modest violet. Connie wore an enchantment in green chiffon. Uncle Peter was attired in a boiled shirt, a dinner jacket, and the usual trousers.

The group had the look of prosperity. Quiet, aristocratic joy seemed to radiate from the silver, from the ancestors on the walls, even from the clear soup served by a contented butler; but this was only on the surface. Beneath the smooth asphalt of joy there were fissures and cracks of worry. The trouble was Uncle Peter. He was the reason why Aunt Harriet was dining and whining.

Uncle Peter was an amiable gentleman of fifty-nine years and three months. In his youth he had taken up as a lifework the making of washboards and wash boilers; but all that was forgiven and forgotten, for Uncle Peter had advanced. He was now president and proprietor of the Little Darling Washing Machine Company. He turned out five thousand little darlings a week, and each little dear brought home the bacon. He was worth twenty million dollars, and he had one bad habit.

This habit was Thursday night. Six nights a week Uncle Peter behaved, but on Thursday something took possession of him. He became furtive-eyed and guiltily silent. His conversation at dinner was full of static. Only when he glanced at his watch did a gleam of hope beam over his face. At the earliest possible moment he would mumblingly excuse himself and vanish. He explained to no one whither he went, nor when he returned, nor what he did in the meantime. Entreaties, invocations, pleas, threats, and tears from his wife did not move him.

"I want one night to myself," he would reply doggedly; "and I'm going to have it, and no questions asked!"

On this Thursday night Uncle Peter had acted according to his usual habit. He had just left the room with a mumbled excuse. Aunt Harriet burst into tears.

Now they were upstairs in Connie's room. Aunt Harriet was continuing the tears, and Connie was still wishing she had liberty and release.

"Don't worry, auntie darling! Uncle Peter's not the sort of man to go out ducking and draking. Perhaps it's a business matter that calls him out."

This sounded silly to Connie, but she couldn't think of anything else. She was as much puzzled as her aunt.

"Then why doesn't he confide in me?" blubbered Aunt Harriet. "Oh, if I only knew where he went!"

"Why not have a detective?" asked Connie practically.

"He'd never forgive me. Besides, if it's something scandalous, I don't want any detective to blackmail me so he'll keep it from the world," said Aunt Harriet, who knew her movies. "Oh, Connie, don't you ever get married! You never know a man till you're married to him, and then you don't want to know him. Oh, what am I saying?" she asked distractedly.

"It doesn't make much sense," agreed Connie. "Lie down, auntie, and I'll have some ice brought in for your eyes."

The girl's desire for freedom had now mounted to a thundering passion. To assuage it, she knew that she had to get out of the house; for Aunt Harriet still belonged to the old lavender period of history, and did not suspect that Connie belonged to the new vermilion period.

"I can't lie down!" wailed her aunt.

"Then—oh, please lie down!"

"Oh, I can't lie down!"

There was a slight clumping in Uncle Peter's room. Envy racked Connie. Even an old buck could take his freedom of a Thursday night, while a young gazelle had to stay home and pet an elderly aunt. What a ridiculous world it—

At this point an idea smote her stoutly. Connie stood graven with joy. Her eager ears heard the almost silent patter of Uncle Peter's big feet down the happy stairs. She came out of her trance.

"Auntie, I have an idea. Listen! Look! How about it? I'll patter after Uncle Peter to-night. I won't let him out of sight. I'll find out where he goes and what he does."

"Connie—my child!" quavered Aunt Harriet.

"I know I'm just a kid," said Connie modestly; "but I want to do my little bit for you. Besides, I want to know myself."

"B-but there may be things not fit for your young eyes to see!" gasped Aunt Harriet dutifully.

Connie picked up her gray krimmer coat, pulled a little red hat over her blond head, and kissed her aunt warmly.

"I'll shut 'em," she promised. "Go to bed, auntie. Leave it to little Sheerluck, the girl detective!"

"No!" said Aunt Harriet. "I forbid it!"

"Another second and he'll be gone! Be a sport, auntie, and unleash the bloodhounds!"

"I—oh, all right—but oh, Connie, if anything should happen to you—"

"We'll blame it on Uncle Peter," sang Connie happily. "Good night!"

"Goo-goo-goo-good night!"

Let us, beloved readers, temporarily remove our gaze from Connie, the girl detective. Let us also forget Richard, the young man afflicted with the necessity of finding a life work. Let us hurry to the stage entrance of the Theater Splendide, just a peanut whistle removed from the Crossroads of the World. Passing through the chilly entrance and up some dirty iron stairs, we find ourselves in the dressing room of one Angelo Valgoni, who is destined by chuckling fate to play a gigantic part in the destinies of Dick and Connie.

Angelo is busy swearing to himself and donning the costume of a French *légionnaire*. He is not an actor, movie or otherwise. His contribution to the silent art is to parade up and down before the Splendide every night in his *légionnaire* costume, carrying a long gun with a bayonet attached. It is thought that this one-man parade will attract customers to see "Sons of Blood," which is currently decorating the screen of the Splendide.

It is thought correctly. Hundreds of ladies every night get a thrill from seeing Angelo's red hat, blue coat, and white pants. They buy tickets. Angelo is a success. He ought to be proud of himself.

But he is not. He hates this commercial business of parading up and down in the chilly blasts in a uniform. He does it only because of love, that funny passion.

He loves a sloe-eyed daughter of Italy-in-America. Her name is Nunzina. Until recently he has had the inside track to her affections, too. Then along came one Umberto. Umby is one of the smart young doormen at the Mastodonic, that glittering movie palace six blocks up Broadway. He wears a uniform of purple, with a green

cape and gold buttons, and Nunzina has lost her heart to it.

Finding her affections drifting, Angelo took thought. As a result, he has also taken the job of ballyhooing "Sons of Blood." To his discerning eye the rakish uniform of the French Legion makes the Mastodonic uniform look as tame as a Sunday afternoon in the Bronx. When Nunzy once lamped it, he was sure that Umby would fade out of her life quicker than snow in Hades. So Angelo warmly thinks to himself as he takes up his big gun and clatters downstairs.

He takes up a position in front of the theater. With dignity he marches up and down, down and up. His restless eyes search the crowd for Nunzy. Ah, Nunzy with the sloe-black eyes and warm red lips! *Santa Maria*, when she once lamps Angelo with those romantic white pants!

Up and down he marched, down and up, and his heart beat faster than any French *légionnaire's* of the shadow screen, for he knew that Nunzy was in the habit of passing this Broadway spot every night.

### III

DICK HUNT sat in the family sedan, for his own car was ill.

The sedan was at the curb on Broadway, near Fifty-Fourth Street. Dick was at a loss. He had taken his problem out into the fresh air, but neither the fresh air nor a short drive had stimulated his sluggish brain. Now he had stopped and moodily felt around for his flask. There was no flask. Dick said some unhappy words. He wished he had a drink.

His eye languidly attached itself to passers-by. Who knew?—one of them might be a bootlegger, and, reading the longing in his eyes, might spring forward with a case; but this proved a dream. He saw no bootleggers, only ordinary people drably walking.

Then through his cloud of gloom Dick became aware that something was happening on the sidewalk near his car. A stout, foreign-looking gentleman was arguing with a fat, foreign-looking lady. About their knees and ankles were grouped six foreign-looking children who were engaged in an American-looking football scrimmage. To Dick's sensitive nostrils came an odor that betokened wine—cheap wine, but still wine. Was it possible that this whole family had a real continental jag on?

Dick felt a protective pang go through him. He could not help foreseeing that this happy family would get into trouble this night unless Providence intervened. They were happy now wrangling on the sidewalk, which no doubt was pleasantly whirling under them; but when they woke up in a police cell next morning, their sorrow would be bitter to the last drop. If they only had sense enough to go home while the ecstasy was still upon them!

From nowhere a searchlight of an idea flashed upon Dick's parched brain. He breathed quick and shallow breaths. Here was a way not only to respond to the surge of love for his fellow men, but to carry out his pop's stern fiat concerning being of use in the universe. Here was an extravagant, mad notion of which Bates would never approve, and which therefore must be right.

Dick slid out of the front seat at once and approached the gay odor.

"Hey, stop fight! Policeman catch! Put in jail!"

Thus Dick addressed himself to the fighting foreigners. He spoke thus in unadorned English in order to make himself clear to the foreign one-syllable mind.

The bickering ceased. The gentleman, who, as Dick now observed, had a dark, oily face and eyes of oriental cast, stared at him with great dignity, and then bowed.

"Sir, to whom have I the honor of addressing myself, and what the hell do you want?" he asked cordially.

"Want to help. You go home, no, yes? Give you a ride in my car. Where you want to go?" monosyllabled Dick dazedly.

"Sir," said the Syrian, for he was such, "I am scarcely in condition to realize whether you are mocking me, or whether it is indeed heaven-sent sympathy that gleams upon your Nordic face. Please and kindly, before yon electric sign again begins to black-bottom, repeat your kind offer and inform me whether it includes not only my lady and myself but the little ones as well."

"It does," said Dick, staggering. "Wh-where do you want to go?"

"Home," said the dark gentleman, with a grateful bow. "Not where the heart lies, but in Washington Street. My name, sir, is Ashley Barbenafian."

"Mine's Dick Hunt. Let's go!" said Dick.

With an evident glow of gratification, Mr. Barbenafian addressed himself to his family. There were cries of joy from all,



and then one swift assault of the sedan. Dick shuddered a little, for he knew that the car would never smell the same; but he gamely seated himself at the wheel next to the Anglo-Syrian and applied the gas. The car shot forward.

Dick quivered with satisfaction. He felt like a knight-errant, or at least like a night errant, as the car flashed southward. He felt even better when he delivered the grateful Barbenafians at the door of a dismal tenement in the shadow of a large skyscraper. After listening to a speech of thanks from the grateful father and husband, he turned his car north again. He let all the windows down and drove swiftly, for clean air works wonders with heavy odors.

Dick felt happy indeed as he rushed northward in his sedan. He turned into Broadway and then into Sixth Avenue. The night was not over by any means. Surely, in this large and troubled city, there must be more souls in need of succor such as he had to offer!

He would find them. He must find them. His night errant blood was up.

#### IV

THE gigantic joy of the new freedom pulsed through Connie Blair as she tiptoed out of the marble palace and set sail after Uncle Peter, who was already two Fifth Avenue blocks away. She quickly gained a block and a quarter on him. Then her heart suddenly palpitated, for Uncle Peter had suddenly wagged his hand at a bus. The bus stopped.

Connie took a hop, skip and leap forward. She made the bus by the twinkle of an earring. Luckily Uncle Peter had climbed to the top deck. On the lower deck Connie crouched in a seat near the spiral stairs.

As the bus sped south, she kept an eager watch on the legs that descended the stairs. At Tenth Street the heavy black brogans and slightly bent legs of Uncle Peter came down. Connie got off at Ninth Street and cut back one block at top speed. A thrill of joy danced through her. There was Uncle Peter still in plain sight, strongly marching east.

Boldly she plunged after him. Her curiosity became painful. Where was Uncle Peter going? Could some light of love, invisible to herself, be leading him through these roaring streets and by all these sad

old houses? Was he doing it to oblige a friend? It was a mystery far beyond anything she had ever seen on the stage or read in a book.

So she tried not to breathe too deeply and swung after Uncle Peter as he skimmed under the Third Avenue "L" structure into a region of gloomy fire escapes, slinking cats, tough citizens, and ancient ash cans. Connie slowed up a little, for silver slippers are not designed for chasing uncles over hard pavements. At frequent intervals, too, East Side tots playing on the sidewalks interfered with her progress; but Uncle Peter smartly weaved his way among the populace and the cans. It was all Connie could do to keep him in sight.

And then, suddenly, her view of him ceased as he swung sharply around a corner. Dropping detective technique to the winds, Connie began to run. Her progress was commented on by a number of young gentlemen discussing current events on a street corner. One of them stepped directly in front of her and cleverly cried:

"Boo!"

She had to make a wide circuit to avoid him, and so lost more ground.

When she finally popped around the corner, she felt a sinking sensation around her palpitating heart. The street was long, narrow, and dark except for two brilliant blazes of light about halfway down its length. One gush of light came from a building on the right side of the street, the other came from a building opposite. People were going into both buildings—people about whom there seemed to hover an eager and a festive air; but there was no sign of Uncle Peter.

There was no doubt in her mind that he had entered one building or the other. Otherwise, she argued, she would still have sight of him walking down the street. But into which of the festive buildings had he filtered? That was the question, and to it Connie could rack no answer out of her brain.

Quickly she walked down the street. She stopped before the illuminated building on the uptown side. A violent placard snatched her attention. In glaring colors it shouted:

YE PAGAN REVEL

of

YE GREENWICH VILLAGE PAGANS

A study in flesh color of two young ladies and some beads prancing in abandon il-

lustrated this text as no preacher ever illustrated a sermon. Connie shuddered. Could it be possible that in his old age Uncle Peter was going in for flesh-colored prancing?

She stared up the steps that led into the pagan den. Men and girls flowed by her. Under overcoats and cloaks and wraps she caught glimpses of pagan costumes. A burst of wild African jazz assaulted her ears. Ordinarily Connie's blood would have leaped at the sound, for she was only nineteen and lived in a pagan age; but to-night the weight of family responsibility lay heavy upon her. She shuddered again, and walked quickly away from that spot. No, Uncle Peter could not possibly have gone pagan.

She walked across the street and paused before the opposite building. Men and women were also swarming into this place. The men were all hard-faced and tough-eyed, and the percentage of large jaws among them was remarkable. The women were flashy, gaudy, and addicted to the simple pleasure of chewing gum.

A thumping Bowery waltz exuded from the windows upstairs. Connie's eye faltered upon a huge placard announcing:

TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL CIVIC BALL

of the

**WAHOO POLITICAL, SOCIAL, DEBATING  
AND ATHLETIC CLUB**

Gents, One Dollar—Ladies, Thirty-five Cents

Good God, this was even worse! It was a den of toughs! What was Uncle Peter doing here—if he was here? Oh, he couldn't be here! But if not, whither had he disappeared?

In grave perplexity Connie stood on the sidewalk between the howling jazz of the pagans and the yowling brass of the Wahos. What should she do? Whither should she turn for help in solving the terrible and increasing mystery of her disappearing uncle?

V

In the meantime Angelo Valgoni paced somberly up and down before the Theater Splendide, and then down and up. Up, down, down, up, he paced, his eager eyes roving questioningly over the log jam of the Broadway crowd.

Suddenly he gave a great start. He let his gun drop so suddenly that the butt of

it struck his big toe. His big toe responded with a mad twinge, and his eyes answered with tears, but Angelo wist not of them. He was staring murderously at a lady and a gent slowly drifting by him in the Broadway tide.

The gent was tall, dark, and fiery-looking. The lady was sloe-eyed and languishing. She was none other than Nunzina, and the gent was nobody else but Umberto. What was he doing strolling up Broadway with Nunzina when he was supposed to be doorkeeping at the Mastodonic?

Umberto's clothes supplied the answer. He was in civvies, not in the purple and green of his doorkeeping uniform. It must be his night off, and he was using it to take Nunzina out.

A great Sicilian oath burst from Angelo. For Nunzy, as she passed, did not for a second take her adoring eyes off Umberto. In vain were Angelo's rakish pants. As far as she was concerned, he might be far off, actually fighting the battles of France in Algeria, instead of in front of the Splendide, parading for love of her.

There are men who can dissemble and hide their feelings, but Angelo was not in this class. As he watched Umberto and Nunzina float by, a red mist wavered before his eyes. Molten fire coursed through his blood. Since with him to feel was to act, he forgot his sworn duty to guard the portals of the Splendide. He forgot he was wearing a uniform that was not his own and was certainly not generally accepted for what the normal man will wear on Broadway at night.

With an inarticulate howl, and still clutching his gun, he plunged into the crowd after the girl of his heart and the treacherous door boy of the Mastodonic.

With cries of astonishment and laughs of wonder, the crowd gave way before him; but he paid no heed to their comments. Breathing hard, he rushed up the street after Nunzina and her lover. He saw them turn a corner. He increased his pace and did likewise.

He was just in time to see them step into a taxi.

"Hey, waita a minute!" roared Angelo, pointing the bayonet manfully at the cab.

His exhortation was lost in the roar of the cab's wheezy engine, and his pointing of the bayonet was unobserved. The cab bounded forward. Angelo imitated it.

"Hey, waita a minute!"

His plaintive request floated on the evening air, but he was totally ignored except for stupid comments from the sidewalk, from people who had never before seen a French *légionnaire* chasing a taxicab.

"Hey, wait a minute!" wheezed Angelo, as he gained two feet on the cab at Sixth Avenue; but the cab rushed across the tracks and blithely scuttled down toward Fifth.

Angelo stopped for wind. He looked around desperately for help. He must not suffer Nunzina and the detestable Umberto to get out of his sight; but what else could he do?

There was not another cab within call. Panting, furious, breathing like an adenoid addict, he stood there, and for all his showy French uniform there was no soul more wretched than he in the whole six million of New York at that moment.

Then the voice of a male angel struck his ear with healing syllables.

"What's wrong, old chap? Anything I can do?" asked Dick cheerfully.

Angelo whirled and stared. He saw a young man sitting at the wheel of a neat and empty car. The young man looked obliging. The car looked efficient as well as expensive.

"I wanta catcha that taxi!" said Angelo. "I give two, three, five dollar. I wanta catcha that cab. My girl, she's there. I wanta catcha heem!"

"Don't mention it!" cried Dick. "Hop in!"

With tears of gratitude rising to his impressionable Italian eyes, Angelo flung his gun into the sedan and hopped in after it. Like a startled bird the car flew over the tracks and set sail after the red tail light of the wheezy taxicab.

## VI

It was seventeen minutes later.

Connie finished walking up and down the street on which the Wahoos and the Pagans were separately celebrating life. She stood in front of the glare that gushed from the Wahoo hall, and a great doubt again rocked her soul. Whither had Uncle Peter vanished, and why? Though she had applied all the resources of her shapely head to the subject, she was enshrouded in a deep, grayish miasma of doubt and ignorance.

But she would not acknowledge herself beaten. How could she crawl back to Aunt Harriet and say she had lost Uncle

Peter between two dance halls? So she stood there and debated with herself just what to do.

Then, quite of a sudden, her attention was distracted from her own troubles to a little drama that was commencing to develop right under her dainty nose.

A wheezy taxi suddenly whizzed up the street and drew rein at the Wahoo curb. Out of it hurriedly stepped a dark-eyed lady and a tall, oily-haired gent. The gent thrust some heavy change into the taxi man's fist, and then, taking a firm grip on the young lady's arm, rushed into the Wahoo ballroom with her.

The gent was Umberto. The lady was Nunzina. Connie did not know this, of course, but the hasty way in which they rushed into the hall made her feel that all was not quite well, and that she had not seen the last of it.

She was soon proved right. The taxi coughed away. A moment later a young sedan glided swiftly up to the identical spot. Out of it jumped an intense, angry-eyed phenomenon. It wore a beautiful French *légionnaire* costume and had a mad-looking gun. It flung a word of thanks to the young man at the wheel of the sedan, and leaped up the stairs six at a time.

The newcomer looked like a young man with a purpose. Connie smiled. Then, as she turned her face away from the stairs, she became conscious of her own troubles again, and sighed.

There was an answering exclamation of pity from the sedan. Connie was suddenly aware that the young man at the wheel was removing his hat to her.

"I beg your pardon," he said gently. "Is there anything wrong? Please let me help you."

There was a lot wrong; but this was also wrong. Connie was not accustomed to being addressed pityingly by young strangers in sedans. She regarded it as an unwarrantable intrusion on the privacy of her melancholy. She haughtily lifted her golden head and strolled away, up the street.

The sedan slid along the curb and sympathetically paused at her side.

"I feel that there is something not as it should be," said the young gentleman, in the tone one uses at a funeral. "I can tell it by your eyes. You must let me help. I'm helping to-night—helping everybody. You must let me help you. I'll do anything you say."

"Then kindly step on the gas and do a tail spin away from here," requested Connie.

"So frail and yet so unfair!" mused Dick. "But you can't reverse the custom of history, dear lady. When a night errant wants to rescue a fair damsel, who are you to tell him to do a tail spin? Besides, you're interfering with my career, my brand new career. Is that nice, to hit a struggling night errant on the bean on the very first night of his career? Lady, be just; lady, be merciful; lady, be—"

Dick stopped, for he perceived that he was speaking his heart out to the vacant air. The lady he thought he was addressing so movingly had slipped out of range. He saw her crossing the street. He saw her quickly enter the illumination pouring from the Pagan Revel, and then, without a backward glance at him, pass into the entrance.

Dick did not like it. To help a Syrian father and his progeny to their home, and a French *légionnaire* to his revenge, were good and worthy deeds. To help this young lady would have been not only worthy, but far pleasanter than the other helps he had given. There was something in the young lady's eyes that had gone right to his heart. Her voice, too, though uplifted in scorn and derision, had had a cool, glinty quality that reminded Dick of the blue of a beautiful lake.

He got out of his sedan and walked across the street. At the pagan door there was a cubby-hole with a face behind a barred window, which was open two inches at the bottom. Dick ambled up to it.

"How many?" queried the face.

"One," announced Dick grandly.

"Five bucks," said the face.

Dick produced them, and a ticket was shoved to him through the two inches. He marched through a chilly hall until strains of gay music smote his ears and he came to a wicket. On either side of it was a gentleman in suave evening clothes. They ran businesslike eyes over him as he presented his ticket.

"Costume," remarked the first wicket keeper in a melancholy tone.

"Or evening clothes," said the second hopefully.

Dick smiled cajolingly.

"Now, boys, don't be hard on me. I just got wind of this racket, and bought a ticket at the door. What do you say?"

"Got to have costume," regretted the first wicket keeper.

"Or evening clothes," sighed the second.

"Now, can't we fix this up?" asked Dick, baffled.

"With a costume," caroled the first.

"Or evening clothes," sang the second.

"I don't see why—"

"Kindly let the lady and gentleman through," requested the first firmly; and as Dick stepped aside a costume and some evening clothes boldly made their way in.

He strolled away in thought. The wicket boys were gentle, but obdurate. It was plain that the gate could not be crashed; but how had the girl with the lake-blue eyes managed to get in? Ah, ha, now that he thought of it, he had caught a glimpse of an evening gown beneath her coat.

How, he asked the street as he reached it, could he procure a costume or evening clothes on the spur of the moment? It couldn't be done. He would have to give up the idea of night-erranting the fascinating young thing who had told him to make a tail spin; or he could sit in his car and wait till the ball was over.

Dick climbed into the front seat of the sedan and lit a cigarette. He would see Miss Tail Spin again if he had to wait until Phœbus arose and gilded the tenements.

He had a strong impression that he had met the young lady before. The meeting might have taken place when he was an Assyrian slave and she was a princess of the blood; or perhaps they had met in some wild wood glade when he had been a centaur and she a nymph. Who knew?

So he waited with cheerful patience. A meeting that had been delayed so long could surely wait a few hours longer.

And then he saw the French *légionnaire* come out of the Wahoo establishment. Dick watched him come out with interest; for it was not the mere fact that Angelo was coming out that caught the eye, but the manner of it.

In short, Angelo was coming out on his ear. A short valedictory spoken by a husky bouncer at the top of the stairs followed him:

"Keep outa here, you big stiff! If you try to crash in again, I'll bite your ears off!"

Dick slid the car to the spot where Angelo was painfully assuming a sitting position.



"Anything I can do?" he inquired with sympathy.

Angelo pulled the gun from under him and looked at it with disgust.

"Theesa damn thing not loaded," he complained, "or there is one bouncer not so much no more. Hell!" he remarked. "They no letta me in the Wahoo dance with thees costume. They say no want no beega steefs in there. I tella them I no steef. I justa want to catcha my girl and that beega steef she go with. They talk and I talk, and they calla beega bouncer, and he throw me out."

"What makes the study of social customs so fascinating," replied Dick, "is little surprises like this. Over here they won't let you in with a costume, and over there they won't let you in without one. Well, it takes no master mind to guess the answer to this one. Say, buddy, you take my conventional trousers, *et cetera*, and I will don your glittering affair. How about it?"

Angelo got up, and, leaning on the gun for support, looked at his benefactor with suspicion.

"Hey?" he inquired.

"I want to get into that pagan scramble," explained Dick; "and you want to gambol with the Wahoos, don't you? Well, do as I say, and we can each have his heart's desire. Why not exchange clothes, see?"

Angelo scratched his ear. This young sport was undoubtedly crazy, but why not take advantage of it?

"You no kidda me?"

"No."

Angelo considered.

"All right! I do it."

He passed into the rear of the car. Dick joined him.

Five minutes later a young man in the uniform of the French Foreign Legion and another in American civvies emerged from the rear of the sedan. The young man in civvies grasped the hand of the other in warm gratitude.

"I thanka you. I meeta you here in two hour, yes?" he said.

"Yes," answered Dick, the French *légionnaire*. "Any last words, Angelo?"

"Yes, meestaire—please keepa those pants clean," begged Angelo. "I gotta deposit on them. Please don' getta them dirty."

"Oak with me," said Dick, and, soldier-

ing his gun, he boldly marched into the flaming portals of the pagans.

## VII

INSIDE he found pagans from Greenwich Village, from the Bronx, from Jersey and Washington Heights, furiously making a pagan night of it. On the floor lady pagans in bisques, reds, and pistachios, and gentleman pagans in blues, oranges, and lavenders, clutched one another tightly and called it dancing. Perfumes of assorted liquor frolicked with tipsy jazz notes from mad African bands. There was not a frown in the place.

Shouldering his gun, Dick marched up the side aisles and peeled his eye for the girl whom he had known some seven thousand years ago. He saw gentlemen dressed like Mexican bandits, like pirates of the Spanish Main, like cavaliers of Merrie England. He saw ladies resembling Turkish houris, Cleo of the Nile, and Eve of the Garden.

A stout lady in the costume of Ophelia looked longingly at him. A dimpled midge whose costume consisted mainly of two long silk stockings boldly smiled at him. Dick marched resolutely past both avoirdupois and the pair of silk stockings. He was in no mood for trifling. In the last seven thousand years of his lives he had not felt so serious. He was looking for the girl who had been his mate back in those dear old days when no one paid five bucks a throw for the privilege of being pagan.

He paraded completely around the hall twice, and then he saw her.

Connie was standing in a shadowed corner. She was puzzled and ill at ease.

Her first emotion was due to her not having found Uncle Peter paganing away here. There was a goodly representation from the Over Fifty-Five Club present, but not Uncle Peter.

She was ill at ease because she had just received a shock. A tall young pagan whose costume consisted mainly of a coat of delirious blue paint had just asked her to dance. Connie was broad-minded, but she could not bring herself into dancing contact with painter's colic.

And now a romantic-looking object in the costume of the Foreign Legion stopped eagerly before her and fixed her with piercing eyes.

"May I have the honor of the next?" said a strangely familiar voice.

Connie's lake-blue eyes flicked over him. She gave a little start. She recognized the hat and coat and pants and boots and gun as belonging to a young man whom she had lately seen rushing up the Wahoo steps, but the voice and the eyes and the manner belonged unmistakably to the young man who had sought her acquaintance in the street outside the Wahoo jamboree.

It was like a dream; but then everything since she had started to chase Uncle Peter had been like a dream.

"I beg pardon—haven't we met before?" inquired Connie.

"Seven thousand years ago," beamed the young man; "and outside, a few minutes ago, too."

It was a dream!

"But some one else had that costume on. It wasn't you."

"It's I now," he answered, and his tone admitted of no refutation.

Friendship is, after all, a comparative thing. Bewildered and lonely here, though in the midst of plenty of pagans, the fact that she had actually met this uniform a few minutes ago seemed to Connie to make its wearer at once an old and trusted friend, a rock to cling to in a strange land.

She smiled at him. He sparkled back.

"Will you dance, or perhaps amble over to yon old-time bar and partake of light refreshment and conversation?" he invited.

She frowned. She had blissfully thought of dancing, too, but now it occurred to her that for a lady detective on a cold scent to think of dancing was certainly not in accordance with Conan. Just then, however, the Africans dynamited the air with "Hot House Sadie," and if ever a saxophone spoke eloquently it was now.

"Well, just one dance," said Connie.

The sentimental soldier parked his gun in the corner and put his arm about her. Connie felt at once queer and clairvoyant. She felt that in later years this young man might again hold her in his arms, might even kiss her, but it would be nothing to the thrill that electrified her now.

"What brings you here, of all places?" asked Dick.

He could hardly speak for his delight, because the music of the spheres was playing, and he was a giddy star dancing in illimitable space.

She made some reply, but they were just rotating in the midst of nineteen rich, brassy chords, and he did not catch it.

"You have the most heavenly eyes I have ever seen," he ventured.

It might not be the correct reply to her remark, but surely the statement of such a magnificent truth could not be resented.

"Can't find him anywhere," said Connie, with a slight wailing inflection. "I've looked and looked."

"I've never danced with any one who feels the music as you do," said Dick heatedly, through the rich clamor.

"Sure, uncle isn't a double-lifer, but—"

"Seven thousand years ago—oh, well, there's no sense in talking of the past with a future like yours and mine!" declared Dick.

"Aunt Harriet will never forgive me! Oh, I don't know what to do!" replied Connie. In her distress she seemed to cling a little closer to him, or perhaps he imagined it. The result was the same. "I—I think I'll have to go," she faltered.

This remark he heard, for the jazz was now piercingly pianissimo.

"You try and leave me!" he challenged.

It seemed a preposterous remark to Connie, for she did not have the slightest intention of leaving him. Still, something had to be done about Uncle Peter.

"I won't go just yet—if you'll help me find my uncle," she said.

"Uncle?" asked Dick, coming out of the ether.

"Uncle Peter. I can't find him. He's disappeared."

The sudden introduction of a relative into a romance that was barely out of the bud shook Dick to his foundations, but he strove to show an interest.

"Where?" he asked breathlessly.

"That's just it—I don't know."

"I see! You can't find him?"

"That's the rough idea."

"And you want to find him?"

"How quick you are to pick up things!" said Connie gratefully; and she spoke briefly of Aunt Harriet's tears, Uncle Peter's Thursday night habit, and her chase.

"I'm going to help you. Where shall I look?" asked Dick eagerly.

This was a case for a night errand, and no mistake!

"You might begin with this place. I have looked, but perhaps I was too excited to see straight."

He whirled her into a corner.

"Sit here, dear lady, and I shall bring

Uncle Peter to bay. What does he look like?"

"Oh, he's medium height, has gray hair and blue eyes and—yes, medium height—gray hair and—did I say blue eyes?"

"Yes—that brings him right before my eyes; but how about a mustache?"

"He hasn't any."

"Too bad!" said Dick. "I rather counted on a mustache. Well, I'm off, fair lady."

"My knight errant!" sighed Connie, giving him a look of gratitude that made his head spin.

Now, it is a stout undertaking to find a needle in a cow shed, and it is a stouter to find in a pagan revel a medium-sized uncle you have never met; but Dick was dauntless. In two minutes he had snared a gentleman of some fifty-five summers, whose head was plentifully gray and who had blue eyes. He was attired in the short knee breeches and tight red coat customarily regarded as the correct attire for a lion tamer.

Dick linked arms with the personage.

"There's a little lady who wants to meet you, uncle," he announced.

"That's different," said the lion tamer in a tenor for which whisky had done its best for many years.

Dick hauled the prize on to Connie.

"Here he is," he announced. "Medium height, blue eyes, and everything."

"That," said Connie with a slight shudder, "is not my uncle."

"I ain't," acknowledged the whisky tenor; "but you ain't given me half a chance, neither."

Dick persuaded him to leave the vicinity. Then, with firmly knit brows, he again ventured out on the pagan sea to see what fish he could land.

His next prize was a blue-eyed old cherub who was attired in the tight black tights, the horns, and the sprightly red tail commonly associated with the devil.

"No," said Connie. "Distinctly no!"

"My dear young lady," said the old devil, with a graceful wave of his tail, "if you'll have one dance with me, here's one devil will go to heaven and stay there!"

"Feeble," said Dick quickly. "Emphatically no!"

The devil reluctantly passed out of the picture.

Dick scoured the floor and picked up a slightly under medium height Caliph of

Bagdad. Connie vetoed him with a sigh; but the caliph was well lit, and insisted on sharing the illumination before he would take his departure. To get rid of him, Dick finished off the contents of his flask.

"Oh, dear!" cried Connie suddenly. "I remember now—Uncle Peter wouldn't be likely to have a costume at all. He's probably in his dinner clothes."

"There isn't a single old boy here in dinner clothes," said the soldier of the Legion. "Where do we look next?"

"Well, get your gun, and let's go up to the balcony," suggested Connie. "We'll take a last bird's-eye view and then see."

Dick got his gun, and they went upstairs. He was wildly happy. He had come to a resolution. He would make his life work the finding of this beautiful girl's uncle. To what nobler task could a young man dedicate himself than that of restoring a wandering uncle to a mourning niece?

Dick felt the joy of a man who has long looked for his niche, and has at last, by a happy accident, been suddenly popped into it.

From the balcony, which seemed to be heaving gently with his happiness, Dick and Connie surveyed the dancers below. There was no sign of any Uncle Peter. Connie sighed, and, overcome by disappointment, leaned against Dick for support. He gladly supplied it.

Then, suddenly, he felt a sharp tremor run through her. She stumbled to her feet. Her lovely eyes were large with amazement.

"What's the matter?" cried Dick. "Tell me, tell me!"

Incoherently she pointed to the little window just behind them. Dick followed the shaking finger.

He looked clear across the street into the window of the building occupied by the Wahoos. The window was brightly lit, and just behind it, careless of who might see, two men were fighting. It was a good fight, with no holds barred, and Dick, who was a lover of the fistic art, would have been tempted to lean out of the window and utter a few snappy cheers; but the girl clutched his arm.

"My God! That man there—fighting—that's Uncle Peter!"

Dick pressed his nose against the window and looked harder. It was true. One of the combatants was undoubtedly a medium-sized gentleman on the greased chute

side of fifty-five, and the other was of about the same years. The other was—

Dick stared harder. A clammy feeling of surprise began to ooze down his spine. He winked, blinked, stared, and moaned. No, it couldn't be; but it was—it was!

The elderly gentleman, who was engaged in fisticuffs with the uncle of the girl he had just met and loved was none other than Dick's self-made father, Hiram Hunt.

### VIII

WHEN a freshman at college, Dick had once been awakened from soft dreams by a flood of iced water from a sophomore pail; but not even then had his blood been frozen as it was by the sight of the uncle of the girl he loved exchanging blows with his own dad. That two gentlemen who were destined to become relations of a singularly close order should be intent only on gouging out each other's eyes gave Dick a severe pain.

Besides, what was his father doing up there in the den of the Wahoos? To the best of his knowledge and belief, Hiram Hunt was not one of the sixteen vice presidents or the twenty-two sergeants at arms of that patriotic and much-voting organization. What duty or dissipation had brought him there?

Dick moaned gently as he raced downstairs with Connie, out of the hall, and across the street. Panting a little with emotion and haste, he dashed up the stairs to the very entrance of the dancing hall.

Here they came to a halt. It was really the diplomatic thing to do, for a tall, beefy man with small eyes and a large round neck barred the way and glared at them with unmistakable hostility.

"What the hell are you doin' here again?" he inquired in a choked voice of Dick, the French *légionnaire*.

Dick wisely inclined himself toward conciliation.

"We're just looking for a man," he said gently.

"My uncle's in there, and he's being killed!" shrieked Connie.

"Yeah?" sneered the beefy bouncer.

"Now, listen—" began Dick hotly.

"Shut up!" roared the bouncer. "I tol' you once to keep outa here. Y' didn't get enough the foist time, hey? Now get outa here before I—"

"My uncle's being murdered in cold blood!" screamed Connie.

Dick's blood suddenly simmered into a heated boil.

"I wasn't here before," he said quietly. "It was another fellow."

"Yeh? Then I'm a liar, heh?" inquired the beefy man.

"You are!" said Dick with furious calm. He supported his statement by suddenly bringing his gun down and pointing its bayonet at the bouncer's capacious stomach. "Get out of the way!" he roared in the very best tradition of the Foreign Legion.

Inarticulately the bouncer stepped aside. He was a brave bouncer, but he was getting only five bucks for his bouncing services for the night, and that small sum, he figured swiftly, would never pay the doctor bills for the puncture the bayonet threatened.

Dick did not stop to reassure him. Clutching Connie tightly by the wrist, he leaped past the bouncer and into the hall.

The sudden appearance at a high society function of a subway digger in overalls could have caused no more buzzing of tongues and cold, shocked glances than the appearance of a lady in evening dress and a gentleman in the rakish costume of a *légionnaire* at the dance of the Wahoos. Lowbrows frowned. Tough-looking ladies openly sneered. It was soon plain to Connie and Dick that they were as much out of place as roses on an onion bush.

Nevertheless, they marched around the hall undauntedly, looking frantically for the window through which they had seen the two old gentlemen going after each other's blood. They did not find the window, for it was not there.

The disappointment and the hostile sneers suddenly weighed upon the girl.

"Good Heavens, I—I think I'm going to faint!" she announced, and, sitting down on a chair, she certainly looked it.

"I—I wouldn't advise it just now," said Dick anxiously.

"Water!" requested Connie.

Dick's heart bled for her, she looked so sweet and delicate and helpless. In the rush of sympathy that flooded his young heart, he forgot discretion and common sense. Though he noted that opposition was massing at the door, he boldly marched up to the Wahoos clustered there.

"Out of the way!" he requested, presenting the bayonet.

The Wahoos scattered. Dick marched



through the hole in the line and gained twenty-six yards to a small counter where soft drinks and frankfurters were to be had.

"Glass of water!" he demanded.

He got it. Happy, he turned to make his way back to Connie. An astonished and joyful voice assaulted his ear:

"*Santa Maria*, I finda my pants again!"

Now it is an odd and uncomfortable thing to march along holding a glass of water in one hand and leveling a bayonet with the other. It is still odder and more uncomfortable to see a suit of clothes that you have known intimately coming toward you draped upon another's figure; but this is precisely what Dick saw as he turned toward the voice.

It was Angelo, the original French *légionnaire*. He was beaming. On his arm was a dark Italian lady. She was also beaming. Apparently all had gone well with Angelo since he had changed costumes with Dick in the sedan.

"Excuse me," said Dick firmly, but Angelo did not notice.

"I thanka you! Everything alla right. I give Umberto one, two, in the eye, and he go away from here. Now please I wanta my pants. I got a deposit on them."

Have you ever, dear reader, in the act of bringing relief and succor to the girl you love, been stopped midway and requested to give up your trousers? Whether or not, you will understand Dick's emotions. To be without trousers in public is at best an embarrassing situation. To be without them at such a crisis is nothing short of a calamity. Steel reinforced Dick's will as he sternly glanced at Angelo.

"See you later," he said briefly.

"Say, meestaire, I got a deposit—"

"Out of the way!"

But Angelo's need was too great to be denied. Abandoning the arm of his Nunzina, he slipped oilily under the bayonet.

"Please, you see me now! I no can wait. I go back to theater, or they will send cops after me. I give you your suit and you give me mine, yes?"

Dick tried to keep the water from spilling and to look Angelo severely in the eyes. He failed miserably in both attempts. Then his blood, which had already been heated and frozen alternately beyond human endurance, took another flop toward the bottom of the thermometer.

For from out the Wahoo dance hall came a sharp cry of agony and distress.

It was the voice of the girl whom he had met that night, and with whom he was already in love.

"Help, help!" cried the lovely voice.

## IX

Dick's first reaction to this pitiful appeal was an unconscious one. A tremor of horror ran through him, and he felt his hair beginning to sprout up on end. He stared at the glass of water in his hand. Then, realizing in a flash of intelligence that it would be of no earthly use in this new crisis, he flung it down. It struck the floor near Angelo, who leaped aside; and Dick, with the howl of a banshee calling to its young, rushed by him and into the seething, writhing mass of Wahoos at the door.

The stoutest Wahoo hearts were, after all, human. They gave way before the red glare in the eyes of the gentleman from Algiers; and beyond their packed mass, standing on a table and uttering heart-rending shrieks for help, was the girl he loved. Below her, his beefy face enveloped in a large, threatening frown, was the bouncer.

"Come on down off there!" he said to the girl.

"Help!" shrieked Connie.

Now the words a man uses in a crisis are very rarely the words that come to his tongue. Philippics of denunciation rushed through Dick's brain as he vaulted forward; and still, as he neared the vicinity of the bouncer, the only word that got itself ejaculated from his throat was a loud, hoarse cry of "Hey!"

The bouncer turned. He quailed a little at sight of the cold bayonet; but since all the Wahoos were looking on with warm interest, he could not afford to quail.

"Get her offa that table!" he growled at Dick. "And then get to—"

His brave objurgation was left unsaid; for a man cannot utter words that make much sense while in the process of being punched in the nose. Besides this handicap, the bouncer suddenly felt the need of sitting down in order to banish the illusion of a dance hall with windows, tables, chairs, and many people all whirling around in funny circles. He sat down.

Dick dropped the gun and held his arms out to Connie.

"Darling!" he cried.

Like a homing fireman, she leaped from

the table into the outstretched arms. He staggered a little, but held her. Then in two bounds he had carried her to the window.

From behind came a sudden bellow from the man pack. The brave Wahoos had seen him drop his weapon, and were now leaping forward to the fray, bold and unafraid.

"Fire escape—down to car!" gasped Dick.

The sensitiveness of love informed Connie of his meaning, even though the syllables were badly mashed in the effort to escape. She scrambled down the fire escape. She reached the street. Dick tumbled after.

"The car—where is it?" cried Connie.

"There."

"It isn't. I don't see it."

"It must be there!"

"It isn't."

Dick stared and started. It was true. The car wasn't there. Only empty gray space was there.

Where had the car gone? But this was no time for speculation, for, as his outraged eyes looked for the nonexistent sedan, they also became aware that angry gentlemen were swarming out of the entrance to avenge the insult to their bouncer.

As the pursuers spied him, their sudden shout left no doubt that their intentions were not of the most friendly. Dick and Connie exchanged one look. In that one meeting of souls they passed along to each other an entire discussion and conclusion about what was best to be done. Then they did it. They began to run.

They rushed down the street. For all his perturbation, Dick was moved to silent cheers at Connie's fleetness. She was a veritable nymph as she fled down the darkish street. In spite of the baying behind them, Dick was happy; for what was trouble when the two of them could run away from it together? He felt like a leaping centaur as he raced along with her.

But in spite of his classic feeling and Connie's brave speed, the pack gained. One startled glance behind caused Dick to change his tactics. Besides, his breath was failing.

They flashed around a corner. The black entrance to a dismal old tenement yawned invitation to them. Dick seized Connie's arm and pulled her into the entrance of that kindly old house.

Crouching there in the darkness, they heard and saw the Wahoos rush by. Connie drew deep, gasping breaths as silently as she could. She clung to Dick, who did likewise.

One joyous minute passed.

"They're bound to come back and find us," breathed Dick. "Come with me, darling!"

Trustfully, unfalteringly, she followed him. Manfully Dick led the way up a couple of miles of narrow, dark, creaky stairs. Then just above their heads loomed a faintly illumined square of glass.

At the same moment there came a loud thumping on the stairs far below.

"They've found us!" panted Dick. "Up!"

He pushed the skylight open, and together they scrambled out. They ran across the roof, under clotheslines and around radio aerial poles. They leaped onto the next roof. They rushed across this and over the next and the next.

From behind came shouts of the frenzied chase. Dim Wahoo figures were also rushing across the roofs.

"Down!" gasped Dick.

"Down it is," quavered Connie bravely.

He forced open the nearest skylight and helped Connie down. Then he followed.

Again Stygian darkness infolded them. They crept down it carefully—down one flight and then another.

Of a sudden, on the second-floor landing, a door opened and a blaze of light rushed out. After it came the voices of men. Some of the voices were raised in alcoholic song. Others were stormy; and above them all rang two voices, loud and strong.

"You're a pop-eyed, bald-headed liar!" said the first.

"You're a knock-kneed, pin-headed fool!" said the other.

Connie and Dick clung to each other in wild surprise and dismay.

"My God! That was Uncle Peter's voice!" cried Connie.

"And that was my dad's, or I'm a green elephant!" moaned Dick. "Good Lord, we've chased ourselves right back to where we started from. This must be the dance hall—or the floor above it. By George, yes, that's where the window was!"

The average man would have been overcome by the realization that all his effort had merely succeeded in transporting him-

self and his loved one back to the point of original departure; but Dick was made of sterner stuff. Arousing himself, he pulled Connie across the few feet to the door and plunged into the room. Then he slammed the door, and, bracing himself against it, blinked at the scene that etched itself upon his retinas.

## X

THE room in which he found himself with Connie was small and square. Its walls were decorated with paper in the design of a rather gay zebra's stripes. Most of its space was taken up by a huge table, upon which was a heartening array of bottles and glasses.

The rest of the place was occupied by as choice and winy-looking a collection of prosperous old gentlemen as you would find in a year's search. They all looked like men whose incomes had as substantial, well fed figures as they did themselves; and yet they all seemed quite in place here in a moldy old tenement room over a tough dance hall. They had an air of belonging.

But Dick did not have time to pursue philosophic speculations; for in the silence that succeeded their sudden entrance, amid the staring of many pair of shrewd, prosperous, kindly, and more or less intoxicated eyes, Connie's voice rose in a hysterical and joyful cry:

"It is Uncle Peter! Uncle!"

A red-cheeked, bald-headed man rose in answer to that cry, from the side of the table opposite the door. He was disheveled, and his right eye looked purple and puffy.

"Connie!" he cried.

But even as he tottered toward her, another man arose from the hospitable table. He was tall; what hair he had was graying; his shirt bosom was protruding, and one sleeve was missing from his claw-hammer coat.

"Dick!" he yelled in astonishment.

"Pop!" said Dick in simple grief.

"Wh-wha-what does this mean?" asked Uncle Peter, as Connie stumbled into his arms.

"Aunt Harriet was worried, so I followed you. Oh, Uncle Peter, what are you doing here?" she sobbed.

Uncle Peter released her.

"That's my business," he said shortly.

Dick spoke up.

"Pop," he inquired sternly, "what are

you doing here, and why were you fighting with the man who is the uncle of the girl I am going to marry?"

"Hey?" asked Dick's father, his eyes straining.

"If it comes to that, young feller," said Uncle Peter, thrusting his jaw into Dick's face, "what are you doin' here? You ain't no Old-Timer of Turtle Bay, and you can go fly a kite!"

"You leave him alone, you mutton-faced sawhorse!" burred Dick's father. "He's my boy."

"Pop, I can't tell you how much—"

"Shut up!" bellowed his father. "What are you doing here? This is the regular Thursday night meeting of the Old-Timers of Turtle Bay Association. I'm an Old-Timer. All these gentlemen, who have made their names and fortunes in the world, came from this neighborhood, and are Old-Timers, too. This"—he sneered at Uncle Peter—"this pie-faced mustard plaster is likewise an Old-Timer. We meet here every Thursday night—go back to the scenes of our childhood—indulge in harmless soft drink and song—"

"It's a secret!" wailed Uncle Peter. "What did you go and tell for? Now my wife'll never let me go out again. An' just for that," he roared at Dick, "I ain't gonna let you marry my niece. I don't want to be related to any dough-faced cluck like your father!"

Dick's father uttered a bellow and jumped at him. The room was immediately in a turmoil. Three Old-Timers sprang upon Dick's father and four upon Uncle Peter, and pulled them apart. A white-haired man with a strawberry nose, who was seated near the door, began to pound busily with a gavel.

Then through the uproar there suddenly sounded a furious knocking at the door.

"I forgot," said Dick. "There are fifty men after us, thirsting for our gore. Go and speak to them, pop. Call them off."

At his last words the door burst open and the light revealed the beefy bouncer standing in the doorway. Behind him stood a mob, and as they spied Connie and Dick they licked their chops.

The white-haired gentleman with the gavel and the strawberry nose leaped into the breach.

"It's all right, Connelly," he informed the bouncer. "These people are friends of mine."

"What?" asked the bouncer incredulously.

"Friends of mine."

"Then what were they doin' raisin' hell downstairs and makin' us chase them across the roof for?" demanded the bouncer.

"I don't know," said the man with the gavel simply, and he shut the door in the bouncer's face.

"Our rising vote of thanks to you, sir," said Dick to the strawberry gentleman; "but what is the meaning of this unseemly fracas between my sweetheart's uncle and my dad?"

"Twoscore and five years ago," said Strawberry Nose, "there was a game of one ol' cat on the East Side. At the end of it your dad chased the lady's uncle home in fury. At the door of his residence the uncle went through a pane of glass. To this day it is unknown whether he went through by his own momentum or was propelled by your daddy's foot. They fight about it after the fifth drink every time they come here. They are fighting about it now, sir."

As if to sustain this opinion Dick's father shook off his three tacklers and got to his feet. The other sleeve was now half gone, and his eye was beginning to mourn in sympathy with the eye of Uncle Peter. He addressed himself heatedly to his son.

"You good for nothing pop bottle, listen to me," he commanded. "You're not going to marry that girl—not while I'm conscious. Unless"—here he grinned, and it was as devilish a grin as one could expect outside a Roy d'Arcy movie—"unless she disowns this goofy blear-eyed uncle of hers!"

Connie, who had been speaking up to now mainly in gasps, tears, and shrieks, flung up her head. Love melted Dick into a tender yearning as he saw her flashing eyes.

"I'm ashamed of you!" she cried to Dick's father. "And I'm ashamed of my uncle, too. I should think two men of your age would find something better to do nights than to guzzle and bat each other in the eye. I disown you, dear uncle of mine, and I disown you too, prospective papa-in-law; and when it comes to disowning, Dick disowns you two, too—the two of you, I mean. Don't you Dick, darling?"

At this word of endearment Dick felt that he would gladly have plunged into molten seas of fire, let alone do such a sim-

ple thing as disown a father. He opened his mouth and let his feelings out.

"I'm through with you!" he roared at his father, who was gaping at Connie as one gapes at a thunderbolt in January. "And it won't do any good for you to come around and beg to be taken back. When I'm through, I'm through. Come, sweetheart!"

And while Uncle Peter foamed gently at the mouth, and Dick's father rocked a chair to its foundations with a sudden thumping fall into it, Connie took Dick's arm and the two grandly sauntered out.

They had hardly taken four steps, however, when, with a simultaneous and hearty roar, both Uncle Peter and Dick's dad leaped for the door and down the stairs.

## XI

THERE was no interference from the Wahoos this time. There were no Wahoos on the stairs. Dick and Connie ran down unmolested; but as they passed the entrance to the dance hall they heard mad voices, screams, shrieks, and the popping of guns. Deprived of the pleasure of rending Dick, the Wahoos had evidently turned their warlike energies upon themselves.

"If we can only get a cab!" murmured Dick, as they passed out into the street.

Then his legs nearly gave way under him; for standing at the curb, blandly, indifferently, as full of poise as if it had not basely deserted its owner in his greatest need, was the sedan.

"For what the gods give!" sang out Dick, and, helping Connie into the front seat, he leaped to the wheel.

He engaged the gears. He was not a moment too soon; for it was a night of quick action, and the police gentlemen of the great town were not unmindful of it. Just as Dick put his foot on the gas, a platoon with night sticks drawn rushed around the corner and up the stoop of the building where the Wahoos were now engaged in brotherly combat. Their first victims were two elderly gentlemen just emerging furiously from the place.

"Either my eyes have gone or it was Uncle Peter and my pop that the police gents took into custody at the top of the steps," caroled Dick, two blocks from the horrible scene. "Well, that'll give them a little more to explain in the morning."

"But where are we going?" inquired Connie.



"We'll drive the rest of the night," explained Dick. "Let's go once or twice around the world. We have a lot to say to each other."

"It's awfully funny," sighed Connie.

"What, sweetheart?"

"I've had a lot of proposals in my young day, and I rejected them all; and now it seems I'm going to marry a man who told the world about it even before he told me!"

"If you want a formal proposal—"

"I don't, dear; but how will it look to our descendants when they discover that you never proposed to me? Those things will out, you know."

"You're going to have your proposal," said Dick warmly, as the car spurted into the gleaming black roads of Central Park. "It's going to be one that—"

He was warming up well, but he didn't get any further; for of a sudden a shape leaned out from the rear of the sedan, and the shape spoke in a voice with a foreign accent.

"Meestaire—I don't lika to bother you—but I wanta my pants."

It was Angelo. And right on the heels of his piteous appeal came a more strident feminine voice.

"Geeva heem bisa pants," demanded the voice.

It was Nunzina.

"How the devil—" inquired Dick.

"I waita in your car, an' you no come," babbled Angelo eagerly. "I take my Nunzina for a ride, and then we come back and set here an' maka keeses. Then you come and starta the car, and we too ashamed to get out. Now we want to go home. Please geeva me my pants!"

"Oh, how sweet!" said Connie, to whom all the world was now a song.

"You make me nervous," said Dick to Angelo; "but that doesn't mean you won't listen to reason. Listen!"

He leaned back and whispered at length. Angelo's pants-hungry face lost its lines of worry. He grinned.

"Alla right," he said.

"Whata he say?" demanded Nunzina.

"You no gotta know," said Angelo masterfully.

His arm went around her waist, and the two of them disappeared into the blackness of the rear of the car.

"Where are we going?" inquired Connie sweetly, for she didn't care where or what for at all.

"Ah!" replied Dick, and the gas dial shot up to sixty.

The family sedan lifted up its wings and flew northward.

## XII

It was the next night in New York—quite as beautiful a night as the previous one. At eight o'clock, just as usual, Bates the austere stood gently knocking at a bedroom door.

"Come in!" snarled a voice.

Bates entered. He saw a piteous sight. Hiram Hunt, the self-made man, lay upon his bed, and if ever a man may be said to have looked unraveled, Hiram was it. One eye was completely closed and royal purplish. His face was stubbly and worn. Why not? He had spent ten hours in a police cell, and a few hours of rest in his own bed had done absolutely nothing to repair the ravage.

"Whaddy' wan'?" asked Hiram bitterly.

"Mr. Richard would like to see you in the library, sir."

"Tell him to—" Hiram Hunt told him.

"Very good, sir, but Mr. Richard asked me to inform you that there are two newspaper men in conference with him in the library, and unless you add your presence immediately he will be forced to give them what will undoubtedly be a garbled and discreditable account of certain proceedings last night, sir."

"Oh, he will, will he?" Daddy Hunt leaped out of bed with the eagerness of a stag. He swung a dressing gown about himself and leaped out.

In the library he found no reporters, but only Dick and a sweet-faced young thing in a negligee.

"Dad," said Dick, "meet the wife. The old family buggy carried us to Connecticut last night, and it's as legal as a justice of the peace and two Italian witnesses can make it."

To express himself, Hiram uttered sounds like those of a radio in agony.

"He's choking!" said Connie in sweet alarm, and she patted the old gentleman soothingly on the back. "Dear papa-in-law, don't take on so! It's all right. We've decided to forgive you for nearly getting the family name into the tabloids."

"And we'll keep mum about the Old-Timers' Club, too," said Dick. "You and Uncle Peter can go on old-timing for the rest of your lives in peace; but no more

assault and battery, or we'll tell Aunt Harriet."

"And now won't you excuse us?" requested Connie sweetly. "We've got to go and forgive Uncle Peter."

"Go back to bed," said Dick, "and I'll have Bates get a beefsteak for the eye."

And they gayly tripped out of the room.

Hiram Hunt sat for a long time looking wistfully at his toes. They must have tickled his funny bone, for little by little a grin spread over his face.

"I told him to go out and find something useful to do, and he went out and got married!" he chortled huskily. "I thought I'd punish him by putting him to work for a few days, and he wished a life sentence on himself; and he thinks the joke is on me. Hee, hee!" wheezed Hiram Hunt, and tottered out of the room.

Ten minutes later, with the beefsteak over his eye, he was fast asleep, and a rosy smile beamed over his face. He was not communing with the angels, but his soul was at rest. He was a happy father.

Dick summoned the car and his new chauffeur. He was a romantic-looking Italian gentleman. His name was Angelo.

Connie dressed with the help of her own personal maid. Her name was Mrs. Valgoni, and she had been united to Angelo in matrimony right after the same thing had

happened to Connie and Dick in Connecticut the previous night.

Mr. and Mrs. Hunt looked happy as they set out, and even happier when they came out of the palace all covered with Aunt Harriet's kisses.

"I was afraid Uncle Peter would never forgive us for the way we forgave him," said Dick joyously; "but when he saw love bringing a little gift of beefsteak for his poor eye—that took the hemstitched gardenia! Why, darling, why that suspicion of tears in your sweet eyes?"

For Connie was undeniably moody as they descended to the car.

"I don't feel right," she said. "You rushed me off my feet last night to Connecticut with Angelo and Nunzina. There's one great moment in a girl's lifetime that you've absolutely omitted. I don't think I'll ever forgive you."

"Great Jupiter!" cried Dick. "You don't think I'm going to forget that!" He turned to Angelo, who was standing at attention in a handsome chauffeur's outfit. "Angelo!" said Dick.

"Yes, saire," replied the erstwhile member of the New York local of the French Foreign Legion.

"Drive us around the park fifteen or twenty-two times. I want to propose to my wife!"

THE END

## IN HARBOR

TRAMPLING under the hissing foam,  
They have all safely ridden home!  
The dying sunset's violent red  
Is making the angry dark its bed;  
The gulls lift inland, veering high;  
A growing black cloud blots the sky;  
The wind begins; the storm at last  
Shouts with the voice of its first fierce blast.  
Beyond the harbor's bending arm  
The plunging, hurrying breakers swarm,  
Thundering and whitening, comb over comb;  
But the fisher fleet are all safe home.  
Boat after boat strikes sail and rests—  
Though still they heave with troubled breasts;  
Now signs will be whipped from their shops, and blown  
All the length of the huddled town,  
Or an elm, plunged flat with its leafy load,  
Will block the wet, rain-pelted road,  
And the sand will run in pillars of cloud  
And dance the dunes while the winds pipe loud;  
But vain the storm that strives with the door  
And the roof, and whinnies along the floor—  
For all our fishers are safe ashore!

Harry Kemp